



TALES OF FANCY ;

BY

S. H. BURNEY.

VOL. III.

COUNTRY NEIGHBOURS.

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BY

S. H. BURNEY,

AUTHOR OF

CLARENTINE, TRAITS OF NATURE, &c.

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OR

THE SECRET.

“ ——— Were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
Thereof most worthy ; were I the fairest youth
That ever made eye swerve ; had force, and knowledge
More than was ever man's—I would not prize them,
Without her love : for her employ them all ;
Commend them, or condemn them, to her service,
Or to their own destruction.”

WINTER'S TALE.

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COUNTRY NEIGHBOURS.

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A SERVANT whom we sent over to East Vale this morning with some additions to Blanch's wardrobe, brought me back the following letter: date it has none; but I take it for granted, that it was begun the very night that she left us, and continued, at intervals, down to the present moment:—

“ DEAREST AUNT,

“ Here I am, half afraid to look round me, in a lofty, spacious bed-chamber, which, by candle-light, has such an air of solemn grandeur, that it makes me regret, almost sor-

rowfully, my dear little cheerful room at Hazleford. I am certain, that if I did not know Miss Tracy was my close neighbour, I should never be able to sleep in a place of which my eye finds it so difficult to trace the dimensions. By daylight it is pleasant enough, thanks to the view from the windows; but for night habitation, it would be terribly dismal, were it not for the occasional sound of Miss Tracy's voice, speaking to her maid in the adjoining room. Now and then too, I hear steps in the gallery, and doors opening in various parts of the house; and all these social noises lend me courage; but the moment they give place to perfect stillness, I shall leave off writing, and jump into bed with all the expedition in my power.

“You love so well to hear of whatever gives pleasure to others, that I know, my dear aunt, you will take some interest even in the trivial circumstance of my having had the delight this day of receiving my first riding lesson. Miss Tracy was so good as to let me mount her horse after we arrived at East Vale; and Lord Glenmorne and Mr.

Tremayne took the trouble to walk by my side, and directed me in the management of the reins; and they assured me, that in a very little while I should become an excellent horse-woman. I think it may be true; because I felt no apprehension, and was so charmed with the experiment, that, but for the fear of fatiguing my two instructors, I could, with pleasure, have continued it an hour longer.

“Miss Tracy draws almost as well as you do, and she proposes to establish herself with me in the picture gallery every morning; and there we are to be patterns of industry, and nobody but Lady Horatia and Sir Reginald are to know where we sit. It is not, however, very unlikely that Lord Glenmorne and Mr. Tremayne may find their way to us. If they do, Miss Tracy says that she will appoint them our lecturers. I must own, that I am not very ambitious of being read to by her noble admirer. He is very sensible and well-bred, and obliging; but his voice—oh! it will never do for blank verse!

“ More company is expected to-morrow, and amongst others, a Lord John Somebody (I forget his surname), newly returned from Italy and Switzerland, who, Miss Tracy says, I shall be delighted with, as he is extremely animated, and passionately fond of music and painting, and will readily give me all the information I may wish for, respecting any of my old favourites whether persons or places.

“ She has just sent her maid to me, with a civil offer of assisting me to undress. I declined giving her the trouble; but there she is, arranging my clothes in the drawers, and I see no chance of getting rid of her, unless I arrange *myself* in bed, and bid both you and her—good night.

* * * * *

“ Well, my dear aunt, I slept admirably in defiance of the awful size of my room, and dreamt all night of what I was last writing about—Switzerland and Italy. I thought I was travelling there with an Eng-

lish party, and you were one of the number ; and I was so happy—so very, very happy—that, like Caliban, I could, ‘*when I awaked, have cry’d to dream again.*’

“ I was to have had another and a longer ride to-day, but the weather has prevented it ; and so, instead of a second lesson in the art of horsemanship, I received my first lesson as a billiard player. Miss Tracy took me to the billiard room, at an hour when she knew that we could have it almost to ourselves ; and with incomparable awkwardness I knocked the balls about, till I was too tired to play any longer, and gladly returned to my more quiet pastimes. Lord Glenmorne is our very shadow ; Mr. Tremayne is gone to see his mother ; but returns to dinner : he is to bring back her foreign servant, who plays quadrilles so well ; and to-night we are to dance.

“ What terrible stuff all this is !—I am afraid, dear aunt, it will never do to insert in your *Journal* !

“ Bed time.

“ I care nothing about the stately proportions of my apartment to-night ; and yet I have more excuse for being a coward than I had yesterday :—I am out of spirits—the evening, and the period during which we sat at dinner : in short, nearly the whole interval since I last put down my pen, has been odd, comfortless, and every way unsatisfactory.

“ Mr. Tremayne came back from Bovil Court so late, that I did not see him till we all assembled in the drawing room just before dinner. I had then no opportunity of speaking to him, though I wanted exceedingly to ask whether he had called at Hazleford ; and, indeed, after an absence of so many hours, there seemed to be a thousand other things which I wished to hear and say. But Miss Tracy chose, the moment I entered the room with her, to introduce me to the travelled guest I mentioned last night (Lord John Alcester) ; and he sat down between us, and began talking immediately, with as much fluency and ease as if he had known me for seven years. His volubility, at first, quite bewildered me, and I felt very much

inclined to dislike him ; but finding that he had power to engage the attention, and apparently to furnish excellent entertainment both to Miss Tracy and Lord Glenmorne, I began to think myself a fool for throwing away such an opportunity of being amused likewise ; and I tried to overcome the sort of disagreeable impression which he had made upon me, and to listen to him with more good humour. To own the truth, he recompensed me for the effort better than I deserved. He is a rattle, and flies about from subject to subject, in the strangest manner possible. But he certainly has *lived all his life with his eyes open* (a circumstance which grandmamma, you know, declares to be so very uncommon), and has a very sprightly and happy knack of describing all that those observant eyes of his have enabled him to perceive. He is, however, much too voluble, and much too complimentary ; though I really believe, that half his fine speeches are uttered in a spirit of bombastic gaiety, never meant to be seriously understood. At all events, they incline me much more to laugh than to feel vain or flattered. He has ano-

ther fault, which I can less easily pardon. He insists upon engrossing too much attention. When once he has fixed upon the victim which he means to sacrifice to his own love of being listened to, it becomes impossible to hear, or look, or speak to anybody but himself. He sat next to me at dinner, and if I had been *tête à tête* with him in a desert, he could not more exclusively have forced me to make him the sole object of my notice. I was sometimes quite out of patience at such persevering egotism; and had I been any where but at table, should have jumped up, and run away; but, surrounded by eighteen or twenty strangers, it was impossible to escape; and, at intervals, whether I would or no, he contrived to recal my wandering imagination, and succeeded in inducing me to hear him with real interest. He speaks on every subject connected with the fine arts, with genuine feeling and enthusiasm;—describes a romantic prospect—a ruin visited by moonlight—the effect produced, under certain circumstances, by good music heard on the water—and a hundred other things of the same

nature, with an accuracy of taste, and clearness of expression, that carries his auditor completely along with him, and brings every detail home to your memory ; or, at least, to your comprehension.

“ I was very glad, however, upon the whole, to be released by the adjournment of the ladies into the drawing-room ; for my attention had been so long kept upon the stretch, that it was thoroughly wearied ; and the luxury of sitting near the two Miss Balfours, who never speak to me, and counting the glass-drops of the chandelier, was quite enviable. I even manœuvred to get out of the way of Miss Tracy ; for, after having been incessantly talked to for three hours, I dreaded the idea of having a word addressed to me by any body.

“ When the gentlemen came in to tea (there was no redress) I was compelled to submit to a renewal of Lord John’s loquacity : but I had armed myself with employment for my hands and eyes, thinking that it might be more supportable to sit and listen to him whilst I worked, than to remain quite inactive during his interminable rhapsodies.

Mr. Tremayne, meanwhile, either did not chuse to approach near enough to speak to me, or concluded that it would be a vain attempt, and therefore never tried. I looked up repeatedly, even in the midst of Lord John's finest poetical flourishes (not one word of which I sometimes heard,) hoping, by the expression of my countenance, to make Mr. Tremayne conscious how much I wished for relief: but, whether he was angry—or—indolent—or indifferent—or what was the matter, I cannot say ;—certain it is, that he still held aloof, and did not give me *one* glance of reciprocal friendliness,—one look that denoted the slightest wish for any interchange of communication with me. At last, I felt too much hurt to renew my mute invitations to him ; and when Sir Reginald approached, and asked me to take his arm and go to the music-room, I arose even with alacrity, happy to remove to any place where I should be out of the way of seeing his nephew's changed and clouded aspect.

“ Lord John was now quite in his proper sphere : music is one of his passions (talking, I believe, is his first), and he is not only a

connoisseur, but a performer. His voice, a full-toned, beautiful tenor, made me forget, when he sung, his unmerciful prolixity when he speaks. He joined me in two or three duets, and Sir Reginald and I were as much charmed by his style and expression as by the sweetness of his tone. He professed, as in gallantry bound, to be equally enchanted with me ; so we began pouring forth mutual compliments, *à l'envi l'un de l'autre* ; and in the midst of these alternate civilities, I descried Mr. Tremayne in the back-ground of the group that surrounded us, and looking—oh, so unlike the Mr. Tremayne whom you, my dear aunt, have been accustomed to see, that I think you would hardly have known him !—Is it possible that he can be envious of the applause bestowed upon a man's singing ?

“ When we went back to the drawing-room, and dancing was proposed, Lord John instantly engaged me for the first quadrille ; and I heard Miss Tracy, just after this arrangement had been made, say to her cousin :

“ ‘ Who will you select, Horace ?—Both

the Miss Balfours *dangent comme des Nymphes*, and their poor mother is dying to see them exhibit. Go and ask one of them: you seem to be quite in the right mood for a stupid, laconic partner.'

" 'I am not in the right mood to dance at all,' answered he.

" 'How disagreeable you will be voted! How disagreeable, I am afraid, you *deserve* to be voted!'

" 'Do not reproach me,' cried he, with some asperity, 'for an effect of which you have been the principal cause!'

" I heard no more; for though Miss Tracy instantly and earnestly replied to this accusation, my tormenting partner, returning to the charge, began talking to me again so eagerly, that he entirely overpowered every voice but his own.

" I can give you, my dearest aunt, very little further account of this most tedious evening. When the quadrille was over, Lord John teased me, much more than in good manners he ought to have done, to waltz with him. Abroad, I used to waltz perpetually: but as I find, that here, there are

many persons (and grandmamma is one of the number) who object to that style of dancing, I am unwilling, particularly when away from home, to engage in it. I therefore resolutely refused his lordship's request, although Sir Reginald, whose good graces he had won by his singing, pleaded his cause very strenuously. The Miss Balfours, Mrs. St. Clair, and at last, Miss Tracy herself, all stood up, however, to waltz; and I then felt, that, had I been asked by any one I liked better than Lord John, I should have had more merit in declining to join them, than I now mean to claim.

“Lady Horatia gently enquired how it happened, that, being so recently returned from abroad, I appeared prejudiced against waltzes? I told her, that my friends at Hazleford, I believed, disliked them.

“ ‘ You were, then, *very* right,’ said she, with emphasis, ‘ to decline dancing. I held out against them in the case of my own daughter as long as I possibly could: and even now, would not suffer her on any consideration to waltz at a public ball. But here, where she is surrounded only by relations

and friends, I think there is no impropriety in allowing her to do as others do.'

"I stole off soon after this, Lord John being luckily too much engaged, just then, to attend to me; and as it was near midnight, I hoped that my quitting the drawing-room, would not be thought extraordinary. Lady Horatia was the only person to whom I bade good-night; and she, seeing me look tired, kindly encouraged me to glide away.

"And tired, indeed, I was of the scene below stairs: but you find, my dear aunt, that I was not too much exhausted to favour you with all this *Much-ado-about-nothing* when I got to my writing-desk.

"Mr. Tremayne disappeared whilst the waltzing debate was still going on: so that, since breakfast, not one word has passed between us the whole day, although we have dined at the same table, and spent the evening in the same room! How little did I think last night, that such would be the concluding sentence of my letter of the night following! Farewell, my dearest aunt."

“ A thousand thanks for the additional supply to my wardrobe which you have been so kindly thoughtful, my dear aunt, as to send me ; and a yet warmer and greater number of thanks, for the affectionate little note with which it came accompanied. I am delighted to hear that you miss me !— Tell grandmamma that her goodness in offering to spare Clavering to come and attend upon me during the remainder of my visit here, quite touched me. But assure her, at the same time, that I have not the least reason to wish for more waiting upon than is readily and cheerfully afforded me by Miss Tracy’s maid. She comes to me morning and evening, and at dressing-times, and decks me out, and folds and brushes all my things, and keeps me in as nice order, as dear good Clavering herself could do.

“ Adieu, my dear aunt. I will not detain Robert to add any thing more to this, than that I am, most truly and gratefully,

“ Your affectionate niece,

“ BLANCH STAVORDALE.”

* * * * *

Poor Blanch!—I very sincerely feel for the discomfort which she so artlessly describes. I little expected that her happiness at East Vale would encounter any drawback from the behaviour of *Mr. Tremayne*!—Yet, even by her own recital, I can perceive that, without intending it—nay, almost without having been able to avoid it—she has given him a good deal of provocation for ill-humour. She owns, that though she was upon the whole annoyed by Lord John's assiduities, yet, that at intervals she listened to him with "real interest," that she was "much charmed" by his singing, and "poured forth compliments" upon him that were almost as flattering as those which he addressed to her. An insipid looking girl might have done all this without exciting much sensation: but the countenance of Blanch is so spirited and brilliant, that every expression which crosses it awakens interest and produces effect. I can therefore easily suppose, that in *Mr. Tremayne's* eyes, she must have appeared far more "charmed" than she really felt; and I am willing to make great allowance for his lover-like irrita-

bility. But I earnestly hope that he will not again repel her, should she condescend to renew her amicable though silent advances. She will not be very tolerant of marked and persevering neglect; and no experiment could be more dangerous, than one which might wear an appearance of intending to humble her by studied reserve.—I wish he would call here, and give me an opportunity of telling him my opinion.

Miss Tourberville comes to us again to-day, at her own solicitation. Her aunt dines at East Vale, and she is desirous to avoid accompanying her. *We* also go to Sir Reginald's in the evening; but Martha, who, as I foresaw, is become Jane's sworn friend, made it her own request to be allowed to remain at home, and bear her company.

Philippa liked her visit yesterday at Bovil Court, infinitely better than poor Blanch did the one which *she* paid there. The party was very select, consisting only of Mrs. Talbot and Mr. Maurice Villiers in addition to the usual family inmates. Mr. Westcroft looked in upon them at tea-time; and they

had music, and a little chess-playing; and' according to Philippa, a great deal of very good conversation. If that was the case, it must, I am sure, have been Mr. Westcroft and Mr. Lloyd *qui en ont fourni les frais*. They were the only two individuals present who had the means of accomplishing such an end.

Lord Earlsford and Mr. Lloyd are to set out this morning on a tour which, it is expected, will detain them from home a month or six weeks. Mrs. Crosby prognosticates, that before their return, the living of Storriton will become vacant. Dr. Dulverton, she says, cannot hold out above a fortnight longer; and nobody seems to entertain a doubt of Sir Reginald's intention to appoint Mr. Lloyd his successor. The loss of such a companion and preceptor will, to young Earlsford, be irreparable; but *his* loss will be an invaluable gain to all the parishioners of Storriton.

We went to East Vale, my mother and I, in a state of mind somewhat anxious respecting Blanch; and the first glimpse which we caught of her countenance, gave us no reason to dismiss our uneasiness. She looked (for *her*, at least) inanimate and spiritless; but her face brightened on seeing us enter, and she sprung forward to meet us with affectionate and genuine delight. It was late, but the gentlemen had not yet quitted the dining parlour; and I had therefore an opportunity, after thanking Blanch for her letter, of questioning her as to the footing which she was now upon with Mr. Tremayne?

“Cold—cold as ice,” answered she, changing colour, yet trying to appear gay and unconcerned; “but punctiliously civil!—Oh, the very pink of courtesy. He sets a chair for me when I enter the room, and asks me how I do, with a politeness that—almost makes me hate him!—And this morning, hearing me decline taking another ride, because I was unwilling to bring Miss Tracy home earlier than her accustomed hour, he took the trouble of applying to a lady who,

I believe, lives three miles off, in order to borrow for my use a safe and gentle horse upon which I might fearlessly venture to accompany his cousin."

"And did his application succeed? Was the horse obtained? Did you mount it?"

"Yes; I felt myself almost *obliged* to do so when the animal was actually brought to the door: but I assure you, that had I been previously consulted, I should most resolutely have opposed its being borrowed."

"Who rode with you? I hope that Mr. Tremayne did not consign both you and his cousin to the sole care of Lord Glenmorne? A man attending upon his mistress, is but a sorry protector for any other female; and you are so inexperienced a horsewoman, that you ought not to have sallied forth without some very assiduous escort."

"Oh, I had escort enough in all conscience! Lord John Alcester went with us, and never quitted my side."

"Mr. Tremayne then did not join your party?"

"He and Mr. Elsmere paraded the highways at the same time that we did: but they

could hardly be said to have *joined* us, since they never moved in a direct line with our cavalcade; and Mr. Tremayne only spoke when he thought it necessary to give me some hint about the management of my bridle, or some caution against proceeding too rapidly."

"But did not such watchfulness evince a solicitude for your safety which out to be spoken of with more thankfulness?"

"It was the solicitude," hastily replied Blanch, "of an offended but conscientious Guardian, who, though he disdains to converse with his disgraced ward, thinks it his duty to keep his eye upon her, and to preserve her from breaking her neck! I may honour the principle which dictated such attentions; but they never can give me pleasure."

I said no more; and Blanch hearing the voices of some of the male guests in the hall, drew towards the sofa on which my mother was placed, and making me sit down, established herself between us, at the same time applying to my father for intelligence respecting the state of her garden, and thus, by

detaining him before her, securing to herself a guard on each side, and in the van.

From her entire silence on the subject of Lord John's personal appearance, I had been induce to conclude that it was perfectly insignificant; and only expected to see a little restless man, with keen eyes, and a great deal of superfluous activity.

When the door opened, I watched for his entrance with considerable curiosity, and two or three new faces met my eye amidst the same groups of individuals I had dined with the preceding Thursday. Which of these belonged to the voluble traveller, I found it impossible to conjecture: and I was on the point of addressing myself to Blanch for information, when I saw one of the strangers detach himself from the gentleman by whom he was accompanied, and advance, with smiling looks, towards the sofa which we occupied. He was handsome—young—had something of a foreign air, and no small degree of easy, gay, assurance. Blanch, though from her heightened colour I was convinced that she knew he had approached,

went on chatting with my father without appearing to notice him; whilst he, after standing a few moments unregarded, drew a chair forward, placed it as nearly opposite to her as he could without inconveniencing my father, and seating himself upon it sideways, rested his elbow upon its back, and his head upon his hand, and in a fine contemplative attitude, listened in silence, with his eyes fixed upon her face, to every word that she uttered.

How long this mute observance might have been persisted in, or how long Blanch would have been able to endure it, I cannot say: but, presently the approach of Sir Reginald brought it to a partial termination. Lord John being obliged, in order to make way for him to speak to us, to push his chair farther back.—He withdrew, not however to such a distance as to prevent his still overhearing what was said; and finding who we were, he arose, and immediately requested the Baronet to introduce him. From that moment, he was, as Blanch said of him in her own case, as well acquainted with us, as if he had known us for

years:—And my mother, who never can resist the pleasure of conversing with a sociable animated person, soon afforded him all the encouragement to talk which he could possibly desire. Meanwhile, I looked about for Mr. Tremayne, and at length espied him at the further end of the room, performing the part of a listless auditor to a lively dialogue that was carrying on between Philippa and his friend Elsmere. He must have seen that my eyes sought him, for his own were continually wandering towards us; but as he manifested no intention of coming to speak to us, I at length arose, determined to go frankly up to him for the purpose of compelling him to break through a plan of such unaccustomed reserve. Blanch seized my hand as I was quitting her, and eagerly, but in a subdued voice, said, “I know with what design you are going—and oh! that you may be able, my dearest aunt, to bring him to his senses!”

“Come with me then,” said I, “and assist in the undertaking.”

She shook her head, and half-smiling, answered, “No, I will not go in search of

any one who intentionally avoids me; but I will, at least, get away from *this* neighbourhood!"

She found the design, however, of more difficult accomplishment than she had expected: Lord John, the moment he perceived that she was about to remove, abruptly discontinued his conference, and started up to attend her. His doing so would have frustrated the end for which she desired to change her quarters; and therefore she renounced the attempt, and looking much provoked, resumed her seat.

I now proceeded towards the place where Mr. Tremayne was standing, and had the gratification of seeing him advance to meet me, the instant he became aware that my aim in crossing the room was to join him. We accosted each other with all our wonted friendliness, and then sitting down a little way apart from the rest of the company, entered into conversation.

"Your hospitable uncle," I began, "has, I perceive, since we were here last, drawn together a fresh accession of visitors; let me

hope that his intended complement of guests is now complete, for really the party is already larger than we ought to have permitted such a novice as Blanch to join. The contrast between the retirement of Hazleford and the brilliancy of such an assemblage as this, is almost enough to turn her head."

"And what would be the harm of that," said he, faintly smiling, "in a place where so many heads are turned by *her*?"

I laughed, and answered: "It is *your* business to prevent such mischief."

"I should be happy," resumed he, a little drily, "to know in what manner so Quixotic an enterprize is to be accomplished."

"I can only recommend one method, which is that of preserving her by your own assiduities from the possibility of even *wishing* to give encouragement to those of others."

"There are few things," replied he, looking extremely disturbed, "that I would not with transport undertake to prove the fervency of my devotion to her! But the task of entering into competition for a transient—

a vague smile—a passing word, with the gentleman who now sits beside her, is beyond my ability ! A monopolizer, such as he is, there is no contending with.—I could neither out-talk, out-stare, nor out-flatter him. I could not charm her, as he does,” added Tremayne, sarcastically, “ by the superlative merit of singing, for aught I know, with the skill of a professor.—I could not rapturously descant, for hours, upon the darling theme of Italian music, Italian painting, Italian poetry, and Italian sculpture.—I could not win her to listen to me with such wrapt attention, to repay me for every descriptive flight with smiles so bewitching; nor, to own the truth, could I summon sufficient humility, or sufficient conceit, which shall I say? to attempt the difficult, nay, probably impossible achievement, of distancing so accomplished, so resistless a personage !”

The bitterness with which this was spoken, I own, almost discouraged me. However, after a moment’s silence, I ventured to say :

“ There is, I am persuaded, more anger than justice in such a representation of the influence which he has gained over her.”

“Anger,” resumed he, “I *have* felt;—or, rather, perhaps, jealousy; but I have conquered, at least much subdued, both these passions.—In fact, what right have I to disapprove your niece’s conduct? She never consented to hear *me* talk of love; then why should I resent her admitting another to that privilege? Lord John has no mother whose anticipated objections can be pleaded as motives for silencing his pretensions; then why should she scruple to prefer him?”

“Why indeed?” said I, with assumed simplicity—determined to punish his affected philosophy—“I had not viewed the subject before in this very rational light; but you have now opened my eyes; and since you are so perfectly resigned to the possible result of his attentions, I see no reason, if he is a deserving, honourable man, why we should attempt to check them.”

He regarded me distrustfully a moment, surprised to find me so provokingly acquiescent; and seeing, perhaps, in my countenance a lurking expression of irony, reproachfully exclaimed, “I understand you!

This is uttered in derision. Oh, be more generous ! Mine is not a state of mind that ought to call forth such a feeling. If, when endeavouring to find arguments calculated to appease my own wretchedness, I have expressed myself like a vain boaster, or an insensible fool, where should I look for indulgence if not from her who knows, and rates almost as highly as I do myself, the value of what I have lost ?”

“ But why *lost* ? Why so ready to despond ? What has her encouragement of this nobleman been ? What is it at this minute ? I see no pleasure in her looks. There she sits, obliged to listen to him at intervals ; but oftener resigning the task wholly to my mother, and gazing with an abstracted air at any or every object in the room, rather than at him ?”

Mr. Tremayne fixed his eyes upon Blanch as I spoke, and the truth of my representation was beginning to produce conviction in his mind, and to sooth his irritated feelings, when a trifling, but unlucky incident occurred, which threatened entirely to counteract the little advantage I had gained. Blanch wore the

bracelet which Sir Reginald had given her, and in a fit of absence, had been, for some time, employed in languidly, but perseveringly, clasping and unclasping it. As she did this without looking at it, she at last contrived to let it slip from her lap to the floor. Lord John instantly stooped to take it up; but when Blanch, bowing her thanks, put forth her hand to receive it, I observed that some contest ensued between them, and it appeared to me, that he was suing for leave to replace it on her arm, and that she was steadily, but civilly, declining the intended honour. Mr. Tremayne watched the whole transaction with extreme anxiety. "If she grants to him a favour which she has so peremptorily denied to me," he cried, "I shall look upon the circumstance as decisive!"

"And you will be very wrong, my good friend, in so doing," said I. "The cases are not exactly similar.—*You* solicited the trivial privilege in a manner which implied that you attached peculiar importance to it. Lord John is only requesting it as a matter of common-place form; he thinks that it would be ungallant to omit the appli-

cation ; but affixes to it no other meaning, except that of gracefully exhibiting his address in the service of a fair lady."

Whilst we were speaking, Blanch, unable to recover her bracelet without submitting to the condition which Lord John chose to impose, quietly gave the matter up ; and, leaving it in his hands, arose, joined Miss Tracy, who was just then passing, and putting her arm through that young lady's, walked with her to another part of the room.

I turned to observe the effect which this termination of the debate had operated upon Mr. Tremayne : but he was gone. He had started up and hastened to Blanch,—secured a seat between her and Miss Tracy, and recovered, as if by magic, all the natural animation of his countenance. Blanch, surprised, but gratified, became less a niggard of her smiles, and gave him (as to a truant whom she rejoiced to find desirous of being again received into favour) a reception, which, though a little embarrassed, was amicable and complacent as heart could wish. Her lenity was not thrown away upon an ingrate. Tremayne, I am convinced, felt it

deeply ; it dispelled every vestige of disturbance from his brow, and substituted for it an expression of the most unequivocal and grateful delight. “ His anger,” to use the poetical language of one of Ossian’s imitators, “ evaporated before the radiance of her smile, like dew before the glorious sunbeams of the morning.”

In the course of the evening, there was music, but Blanch was not the only female performer ; nor, as on former occasions, the most admired. Philippa sung duets with Lord John, and exerted herself very successfully to sing them with superior effect. Her heart—at least, her vanity—was intent upon compelling applause even from Sir Reginald ; and she gained her point. Her voice, though different in its quality, is quite as powerful as that of Blanch ; and, catching something of her style, she infused such unusual expression into her performance, graced it with such admirable embellishments, and evinced such real good taste, that I could hardly believe it was my sister whom I heard ; so completely had the happy faculty of imitation transformed her from a moderate, and,

sometimes, not very elegant singer, into an interesting and an energetic one. Blanch had executed her own task with incredible *nonchalance*, and in a *sotto voce* tone, which, in that large room, produced no effect whatever. That the feebleness of her performance, however, had been *voluntary*, was proved by the cheerful, unmortified air of admiration with which she listened to her brilliant competitor, and marked, with ready applause, every unwonted excellence which she displayed. Miss Tracy, chagrined at the little pains which her young favourite had taken to maintain her accustomed superiority, whispered to me, "What can have induced Blanch to yield the palm which, with such ease, she might have retained, so passively to another?"

"It is possible," answered I, "that without ever having read *La Rochefoucault*, her conduct may have been instinctively influenced by the spirit of one of his most beautiful maxims: *Il n'y a que les personnes qui evitent de donner de la jalousie qui meritent qu'on en ait pour elles.*"

"You mean, then, that she has been

singing in that unpardonably sleepy manner to spare Horace the vexation of hearing her praised by Lord John? I am afraid I should not, in her case, have been half so generous, for he has behaved very ill to her during these last two days."

At this moment, my eyes were caught by the sight of Blanch's bracelet, depending from Lord John's hand as he stood singing by the side of Philippa. He appeared to hold it very slackly, and was mechanically waving it backwards and forwards, like a pendulum, in very correct time with his performance. I directed Miss Tracy's observation towards it, and made a sign to her to rescue it from him. She understood me, and nodded; but made no attempt to secure it till the duet was over. Then, by one light and dextrous *twitch*, she gained possession of the prize, and passed it on to me before Lord John was able to look round and ascertain who had robbed him. The outcry was of course great, when Miss Tracy's laughing eyes led to her being suspected. She only defended herself by protesting, that *if* the bracelet had been seized by her, it was no

longer in her hands; whilst I, fearful of being questioned in my turn, slid it round to Blanch, who adroitly delivered it, without being observed, to Sir Reginald. It was quite a rehearsal of the juvenile game of *hunt the slipper*. Lord John was completely puzzled; he went from one individual to another, interrogating, entreating, remonstrating; but without avail. Smiles, and denials, and shakes of the head, were all that he could obtain; and, at last, he was forced to submit to his loss, unpitied by any of the party, Lady Earlsford, perhaps, excepted; who, I imagine, would not have been sorry had all interference been abstained from that tended to impede the progress of his gallant devoirs. They obstructed the quieter assiduities of her son; they had, she saw during dinner, made him grave and dissatisfied; they might, eventually, lead to a breach between him and Blanch; and provided the latter loses her influence over Mr. Tremayne, the Viscountess, I believe, has generosity enough not to object to her captivating any one else.

In our way back from the music to the drawing-room, a rumour reached us that there was to be dancing again this evening, as on the preceding, Lord John, as soon as he heard it, looked round for Blanch, probably to engage her for the first quadrille; but she had slipped through a side door leading from the passage we were traversing to the great hall, and thence to her own room, where she remained till she supposed that all who meant to dance would be provided with partners.

When she returned, and found her object fully gained, she seated herself beside me, and became a contented looker on.

“Did you run away,” said I, “to avoid the honour of being asked by Lord John? He waited for you as long as he had influence to induce the others to defer beginning.”

She smiled, but made no direct reply; and presently, looking towards the lower end of the room, opening by a folding door to a small apartment lighted up for the card-players, she said;

“They are going, I fancy, to sit down

to loo in that room. Will you go with me, my dear aunt, and look on whilst they play?"

As we proceeded towards the folding doors, Mr. Tremayne disengaged himself from Lady Balfour, whom he had unwarily suffered to catch hold of him on his return from the music-room, and attended us to the loo-table.

"Are you going to play?" said he, addressing us jointly—

"I am not," answered I, "and as for Blanch, she had, surely, better avoid engaging in a long round game, which may prevent her being able to dance the whole evening."

"My dear aunt," said Blanch, laughingly, "let me tire myself my own way! I know how superlatively tedious a round game can be: I know to what I condemn myself; but of two evils, *that* is the lightest, in my opinion, which is not forced upon me by others, but is of my own seeking."

"Is *dancing*, then, the greater evil which you have formed so decided a resolution against?" enquired Mr. Tremayne.

"Why," said Blanch, gravely, but gently,

“ why do you ask ? I should like to know what can possibly induce you to think it worth while to have any curiosity about the matter.”

“ It certainly is very extraordinary,” cried he, endeavouring not to smile, “ that any interest should be excited by what *you* do ! But so it is ; and I can only account for it, by supposing (as I meant to solicit the honour of your hand for the next quadrille), that this *contre-temps*, of finding you so disinclined to dance, has alarmed my indolence, by giving me the uneasy prospect of having another partner to seek. Can you require a fairer explanation of my inducement for having *some curiosity* about the motive of your determination ?”

“ My motive,” answered she, with brightened looks, “ I shall keep to myself ; but my determination I am very willing to give up. Consider me, therefore, as engaged to you. And now, my dear aunt,” added she, turning to me, “ I have no longer any business in the card-room. Shall we go and take possession of the sofa in that snug recess ?”

The spot to which she pointed, behind one

of the leaves of the open folding door, looked temptingly quiet, and I instantly directed my steps towards it. They both followed me; and we all three seated ourselves, much pleased with our retreat.

The answer of Blanch to Mr. Tremayne's last speech ;—her “ Consider me as engaged to you,” had evidently enchanted him. He now gaily drew from his waistcoat pocket her quickly-circulating bracelet, and said, “ My uncle has been prevailed upon to resign to me the pleasure of restoring to you this ornament: he fancied, that by conditioning with you before I surrendered it, *I* might be admitted (as a friend of longer standing) to the very privilege which you refused to Lord John. But, admire my generosity !—I give you back your own property without having the temerity to attempt making any terms with you at all.”

As he spoke, he presented the trinket to her, which, without touching, she looked at a moment with an air of indecision; and then, colouring a little, and turning away her eyes, but affecting to speak in a disengaged tone, she said, “ Keep it; take charge of it your-

self ; and should there ever come a time when Lady Earlsford in short," (proceeding with greater rapidity, laughing, yet colouring still more deeply) " should it ever be allowable for me to bestow upon you so signal a mark of my favour, bring back to me this gift of your kind uncle's, and I pledge my word, that you shall be the first, and the only person whom I will ever admit to the honour of clasping it round my arm."

He must have been a difficult man to please whom a concession such as this would not have satisfied. Mr. Tremayne shewed himself most gratefully penetrated by it ; and his thanks were as warm and energetic as the place and time would allow. And in good truth, though she had endeavoured to lessen the effect of her own kindness, by laughing as she spoke, there yet remained quite sufficient proof of its reality, to give exquisite pleasure to a man so recently recovered from a strong fit of jealousy, and so little accustomed to being pampered by his fair mistress with too much indulgence.

I would not, though I wished it, remove entirely from their vicinity after the transfer

of the bracelet, lest a decided *tête-à-tête* should draw upon them the observation of Lady Earlsford; but I was considerate enough to recede gradually to the furthest corner of the large, old-fashioned sofa; and from that moment, I neither looked at them, nor, voluntarily, overheard a single sentence of their dialogue.

Just as the quadrille-party was breaking up, Mr. Tremayne's servant (the same who had attended him whilst at Hazleford) cautiously opened a side door near which we were sitting, put his head a little way within it, and catching his master's eye, with a very mysterious but respectful look, seemed to invite him to a parley. Without rising, however, Mr. Tremayne, only bending a little forward, said, "What is the matter, Wilson? What brings you here?"

"Sir, if you please," answered the man, almost in a whisper, "I must speak with you directly."

Mr. Tremayne reluctantly got up, and went towards the door; saying as he passed me,—“I suppose the fellow has lost a key, or forgotten some order, which, very pro-

bably, I never should have thought of again myself.--Would he were a hundred miles off!"

But the start—the air of extreme surprise with which he listened to the few words spoken in a hasty whisper by Wilson, instantly proved that the intelligence which they communicated, whatever it might be, was not of a nature so trivial as he had prognosticated. He remained for half a second motionless and thoughtful: then addressed some brief sentence to the servant that immediately dismissed him: after which, returning to us with the countenance of a disappointed man, he said in an under voice: "Need I tell you, how grieved I am to be torn from your society?—But go I must;—and I scarcely know for how long!—I was so happy here—and I had looked forward to being still so much happier!"

"You must go?" repeated Blanch, changing colour, "Whither?—You are not setting out on a journey, I hope, at such an hour as this?"

"No;—I am not even called upon to quit the house: but a person is arrived—is inquiring—is waiting for me, to whom I must

instantly hasten.—Pity me, as much as if I were just entering a chaise that was to convey me fifty miles from hence!”

“Not quite,” said Blanch, re-assured; “fifty miles could not be so quickly retraced as fifty yards. Go, therefore, since you must, and endeavour to return very soon.—I will not forget our engagement.”

“Thank you—thank you, sweet Blanch.—I now go with some courage.”

He then hastened away; and Blanch, who followed him with her eyes till the door was closed upon him, turned to me when he was gone, and said—“What a lamentable thing it is, that a man whose countenance is naturally so open and noble, should ever suffer it to be disfigured by gloom and suspicion!—During these two last days, I used, when I looked at him, to wish myself back again at Hazleford a hundred times in an hour. The whole comfort of my visit seemed to be destroyed by it; for you know, my dear aunt, he was my oldest acquaintance here; and we had always been such excellent friends before! And then, all at once, when I most wanted his support and attention, to

find him so negligent—so repelling—oh, it was the most depressing, mortifying thing that ever happened to me! I several times thought (when I saw him so readily yielding to Lord John every opportunity of approaching me) that he only wanted a pretext to put an end to the friendly intercourse that had subsisted between us; that he was tired of conversing with me—tired of his own civility;—and, oh, how my proud heart swelled at the idea!”

“But you understand the matter better now, my dear girl, do you not?” said I, “You are aware that no such paltry caprice dictated the change in his conduct? Mr. Tremayne, with every recommendation that person, talents, manners, and rank in life can give him, is yet, truly and unaffectedly modest. He fancied that you discerned superior merit in Lord John; that, encroaching as he is, you lent a complacent ear to him; that, gratified by his admiration of your musical abilities, you peculiarly exerted yourself to charm him.”—

“To charm *him*?” interrupted Blanch, disdainfully. “Oh, how could Mr. Tre-

mayne admit such an idea? I must *know* people,—I must love, or at least respect them before I can ever feel any anxiety for their applause. Except Sir Reginald, Lady Horatia, and Miss Tracy, there is not a single individual amongst the various inmates of this house, whose most unqualified commendation would awaken in me the slightest vanity.”

“ You exclude Mr. Tremayne, then, from the number?”

“ No, no!” answered she, thrown off her guard, and speaking with unusual warmth, “ I place him above them all.”

The words were pronounced, and not to be recalled;—but the vivid blush that followed them, the agitated confusion with which the next moment she started up, and moved from the sofa, were evidences, that even to me, she regretted their having escaped her; and that, far from wishing, as young ladies are often wont, to make the secret of her heart a matter of sentimental discussion, she had betrayed it completely by surprise, and was disconcerted and vexed at her own

want of self-command. The fact is, her attachment is deep and real : a mere fancied passion generally leads to a romantic desire of depositing in the bosom of a sympathizing friend a confidential avowal of exaggerated hopes and fears, the suggestions only of girlish self-importance :—but the feelings of Blanch are of a higher, a more genuine description ; they are not the exaltations of imagination ; she has not talked herself into a belief that she is in love ; her enthusiasm is in her *heart*, not in her *head* ; and any allusion to the state of that heart, whether made incautiously by herself, or officiously by another, would touch her too sensibly not to excite vexation and distress.

She was joined, before she had moved three paces from her seat by Lord John Alcester, who poured forth lamentations without end at his own hard fate in having been compelled to dance with another ; and entreaties the most urgent that she would promise to be his partner for the next quadrille. She thanked him with great civility, but said that she was engaged, and tried to pass on.

“Engaged!” repeated he, incredulously, “Fair Blanch, you mistake; you mean to say that you are *estranged*!”

“I am not a very accurate English scholar, my Lord; but still, *engaged*, I think, was the word that I intended to use. *Estranged*, in the present instance, seems to me to have no meaning.”

“Too much—too much, alas! Every look, every accent, proclaims the justice of the term. Did you not sing with me as languidly as if you had been chanting a dirge amongst hired mourners? Do not your looks avoid encountering mine as if the sight of me were noxious to your eyes? Is not the very sound of your voice altered when you speak to me? What are all these, fair lady, but infallible signs of estrangement!”

“I am a little surprised,” replied Blanch, with admirable composure, “at the extraordinary nature of these complaints; but as I cannot plead guilty to the charges which they imply, without admitting that I have conducted myself towards your Lordship with coquetry and caprice (faults which I am not willing to tax my conscience with), I

can only say, that I am much concerned to have had the triple misfortune of singing, looking, and speaking, in a manner which your lordship disapproves."

She then attempted, once more, to proceed; but he detained her to hear him protest with great vehemence, that she had misinterpreted his meaning;—that he had not presumed to *disapprove*, but merely intended to *lament* her altered manner——and a great deal more in the same strain, which, having patiently allowed him to utter, she at length gaily answered, by saying,

"You began, my Lord, by exaggerating my defects, and now you are exaggerating your own sensibility. It is impossible that all these lamentations and regrets should be real. You make use of expressions that are too strong to be uttered between persons who know so little of each other as you, my Lord, and I do. Let us talk more in our accustomed style.—How did you like the singing of Miss Philippa Stavordale? Has she not a very fine voice?"

"You were determined not to put your own in competition with it!—Yes;—she cer-

tainly has a great deal of musical talent. Who did she learn of?"

Blanch, from having often heard Philippa boast of the high compliments which her master had paid her when she was in town with Mrs. Talbot, was able to mention his name; and Lord John, finding her unwilling to let the conversation revert to his pretended grievances, was glad to continue talking to her upon the subject which she had herself started.

Mr. Tremayne's absence was of longer duration than the disposition to remain quiet of the dancing part of the company. Speedily rested, those who had belonged to the first quadrille, prepared to begin another;—all but Lord John, who, not being able to prevail upon Blanch to consider her engagement as rendered null and void by the disappearance of her partner, chose to follow her into the card-room, and to sit beside her whilst she watched the progress of the game.

At length, Mr. Tremayne returned, and seeing me still occupying my old place near the door, stopped a moment, though apparently in haste to speak to Sir Reginald, and

said, in a low voice, " You will be surprised though not as I have been—not as my uncle will be,—but you and every body will be surprised when you learn *who* it is that I was called out to. Charles Tourberville, Jane's father, is just arrived. I cannot exactly comprehend what has induced him to come upon us so unexpectedly : but here he is ; and I am commissioned to announce the circumstance to Sir Reginald. I must do it cautiously, and I hope that after the first agitation is over, I shall be hailed as a messenger of welcome news.—Where is Blanch ?—Is she," cried he, darting his quick eyes towards the dancers, " is she in their set ?"

" No, no; do not be so distrustful ! She is looking on at the card-players. She has withstood every argument that could be used to induce her to accept, during the interval only of your absence, any other partner."

" My dear friend," exclaimed he, with sparkling eyes, " how you rejoice me ! Beloved Blanch ! Ah, tell her, I beseech you, how gratefully I feel such kindness ;—tell her the motive of my prolonged detention ; keep up my interest with her whilst I am

still compelled to be away ; and thank her—bless her, for sparing me the mortification of thinking, that in my absence she forgets me.”

He was then hastening to Sir Reginald, but suddenly checking himself, and standing in suspense a few moments, he turned back, and added, “ Will you have the goodness to apprise Helen Tracy of Tourberville’s arrival? and to tell her, that I wish her mother and my own to be informed of it with as little delay as possible?—His spirits are in that nervous, agitated state of forced elevation, which renders it very probable that after a short interview with his father, he may, to avoid painful retrospections, propose joining this party. Should that occur, it would be highly desirable that those who are connected with him, should be prepared for his appearance.

I saw the case exactly in the same light ; and assured him that the moment Miss Tracy, who was dancing, resumed her seat, I would speak to her.”

He then went without further hesitation, in pursuit of his uncle, with whom, soon after, he quitted the room.

It was well that he had been considerate enough to plan the means of breaking to his mother, before she actually saw him, the intelligence of Mr. Tourberville's very sudden, and wholly unlooked-for arrival. Her agitation on being informed of it by Lady Horatia, was excessive; and as she never has bestowed much pains upon the acquisition of habits of self-controul, her emotion speedily became visible to the whole room. Lady Horatia, to give her time to compose herself, recommended her retiring for a short time, with Miss Tracy, to that young lady's dressing-room. The Viscountess, scarcely restraining an hysterical sob, tacitly consented; and leaning upon Helen's arm, quitted the apartment amidst the whispered conjectures, and wondering looks of all who remained behind.

When Blanch was made acquainted with the event of the evening, and heard that Mr. Tremayne was of opinion, his cousin (even on this first night of his return), meant to come amongst us, she was wholly incredulous, "It is not possible, my dear aunt," cried she, in a low voice, "that you can

have rightly understood what was said! Mr. Tourberville can never be so hardened—he never can have the unfeeling levity to wish, at such a moment, to throw himself in the way of a set of gay strangers, all eager to stare at him, and all, from their situation in life, well acquainted with his history,—with the disgraceful motive of his departure from this house a few years ago,—with the death of his wife, said to have been accelerated by his desertion,—and with his long estrangement from his justly irritated father!—Good Heaven! how could he have the courage to tell that father that he was capable of harbouring so strange an idea!”

“That an unperverted mind like yours, my dear Blanch,” said I, “should deem the circumstance so extraordinary, is by no means a matter of surprise to me; but I can assure you, that I have reported Mr. Tremayne’s words very faithfully.”

Presently Miss Tracy re-appeared, unaccompanied, however, by the Viscountess, who, she told us, had decided upon going home without returning to the drawing-room,

and was waiting up stairs for the arrival of her carriage: "She would not permit me to remain with her," continued Helen, "but sent me down to make observations upon the behaviour of Mr. Tourberville (in case he should really appear), for the purpose of detailing them to her, in order to aggravate, possibly, her own irritation. How strange it is, that we are so seldom willing to content ourselves with the unavoidable degree of discomfort which unpleasant circumstances must in their own nature inflict, but chuse to set our wits to work to find out means to add to their bitterness!"

Dancing, card-playing — even flirting — every pastime was suspended from the moment it became generally understood that Sir Reginald's *prodigal son* was returned, and intended, it was believed, to exhibit himself to the assembly. The expectation of seeing a known libertine—a man who had occasioned a divorce—who had lived an alien from his country and family during so many years—whose presence his father's sister, it appeared, had not nerves to encounter—kept

the whole party in a most delicious state of suspense and curiosity.

"I wonder what sort of looking man he is," said one.

"I should like to know," said another, "what is become of the shocking woman he took abroad with him."

"Do you really believe," enquired a third, "that he married her?"

"Oh, no," replied the second speaker, "I heard that he broke off the connexion before the end of the first twelvemonth, and that somebody else is living with him now."

"Dear! — What a wretch! — Upon my word I think Sir Reginald ought not to receive him."

"Oh, Sir Reginald will be glad enough to get him back, and persuade him, if he can, to marry again."

Blanch looked at me, all amazement:

"Marry again!" whispered she, "What woman in her senses would accept him?"

At that moment the drawing-room door opened, and all eyes were impatiently turned towards it in the hope of beholding the new-

comer: but Mr. Tremayne entered,—and, alas! entered alone. He went up to Lady Horatia, and learning from her, I suppose, that his mother was above stairs waiting for intelligence of his cousin's proceedings, in less than two minutes he disappeared again.

“How provoking!” cried Mrs. St. Clair; “I positively begin to think that we shall not see Mr. Tourberville at all to-night. Who first put the notion about?”

“I believe that Mr. Westcroft did,” answered one of the Miss Balfours.

“Oh, then, depend upon it there is nothing in it! He delights in circulating a plausible hoax. I am convinced, now, that the report is totally unfounded.”

“Then, I think,” resumed Miss Balfour, “that we might as well dance another quadrille.”

Much amused by finding that their recurrence to *one* species of diversion had only been delayed by the hope of enjoying *another*, so very different in all respects, I saw them set off to form arrangements for a new dance, with no very exalted impression of

the sensibility of their hearts:—and presently after my father's carriage was announced.

It was now nearly midnight; it was determined, therefore, that we should take leave the instant Philippa, who was amongst the dancers, should be released. Yet my mother owned to me that she was sorry to go without having seen the worthy heir of East Vale.

“We always like,” said she, “to stare at a man who has been much talked of,—no matter on what account;—no matter whether he has been a knave or a hero;—whether he is going to be hanged, or going to receive the thanks of parliament:—still, if he has been made a frequent subject of conversation, we are glad to look at him, and fancy that his notoriety must have given a peculiar something to the expression of his countenance, which we shall not detect in other men. Blanch,” continued she, on seeing her grand-daughter approach, “be sure you write to us to-morrow. It will be very pretty employment for you to describe this new inmate: I fear I shall be forced to go without having had a glimpse of him. You must

remedy the misfortune ;—you must look at him for us ; you must observe diligently whether he has a cloven foot ; you must take notice whether the candles burn blue when he is in the room ; and whether a strong smell of sulphur is perceptible in every place through which he passes.

Blanch smiled, but immediately said, “Do you not think, grandmamma, that instead of leaving me to ascertain all these particulars, it would be better to send for me home to-morrow?”

“Why so ? Are you afraid of this reputed Lucifer ?”

“Not at all : but I think the usual state of the house will be entirely changed by his arrival. There will be continual private conferences ; Sir Reginald and Lady Horatia will be engrossed by family affairs, and every guest will be in their way.”

“Not such a young guest as you are, who may be made over without ceremony to the care of Miss Tracy. If they could get rid of some of their older visitors, who must be treated with more form and etiquette, I dare say they would be glad : but as to you,

child, do not flatter yourself that you are of consequence enough to be a restraint to any body."

"But, dear grandmamma, Miss Tracy does not want me whilst Lord Glenmorne is here; nor do I, to say the truth, want any further intercourse, at present, with Lord John Alcester. I am terribly tired of him!"

"Let me be Blanch's advocate, in this case," said I, addressing my mother. "The desire which she expresses to avoid prolonging her stay here, is exceedingly natural. Miss Tracy, as she observes, can do very well without her; and, exclusive of Lady Horatia, who, probably, will have no time to attend to her, there is not another female in the house from whose notice and kindness she can hope to derive the smallest support. Mr. Tremayne, it is to be apprehended, will be much engaged with his cousin, and Blanch, thus deserted, will be thrown entirely upon the politeness—or humanity—or gallantry—or all combined, of Lord John Alcester for protection. Is it right to expose her to the risk of finding herself placed in so unpleasant a predicament?"

“ Well, well,” cried my mother, “ settle the business between ye ! Here is as much fuss made to prove that an old grandmother has not half the foresight and wisdom of her daughter and granddaughter, as used to be made in *my* young days, to prove that grandmothers had more sense than their grandchildren !”

Having thus far succeeded, I accompanied Blanch, at her own entreaty, to Lady Horatia, and frankly made known our motives for desiring, at the present juncture, to withdraw our young charge from East Vale. When I paused, her ladyship, with great kindness taking Blanch by the hand, replied :

“ What can I say, my dear Miss Stavorale, to such a statement ? It excites in me much regret ; yet, I cannot but allow, that, circumstanced as we are now likely to be, it is not altogether one that I can reasonably oppose. I certainly shall have less time than hitherto I have had, to enjoy the society of your niece ; and, as you remark, she is too young to be here without the advantage of some proper female friend, always at leisure, —always sufficiently disengaged, to protect

and attend to her. That just now, cannot be the exclusive province of my daughter, who, as you must perceive," added she, with a smile, "is too often put in requisition by Lord Glenmorne, to be very safely depended upon as a frequent associate by any one else. Our other ladies are all too full of themselves to bestow the requisite degree of notice upon an inexperienced fellow-guest; your sweet Blanch, therefore, would be left more than could be proper, to the assiduities of the male part of our—*now*, I must say—unwelcome circle. I wish many of them were away!—Few amongst them, including ladies as well as gentlemen, have hearts which qualify them to be desirable inmates at such a period. Had Sir Reginald been prepared for what has this evening occurred, how different would have been his domestic arrangements!"

Could I have been at any loss to comprehend this remark, it would, on looking round, have been amply elucidated. At a moment when it must be known how agitated were the feelings of the master of the house, Lady Horatia could not but be dissatisfied at the

selfish unconcern with which those amongst his guests who were not gaily dancing, were intently engaged at cards, or in frivolous conversation. Not a single individual present, appeared to recollect that any thing unusual had taken place. They would all have been willing to discontinue their occupations had Mr. Tourberville afforded them an opportunity of gazing at him : but whilst he remained invisible, no one seemed to care about him ; no one looked as if a thought ever occurred of what might be passing in the father's mind, — and no one, except Blanch, had the remotest apprehension of being in the way.

When I found how thoroughly Lady Horatia, coincided in opinion with me as to the propriety of removing Blanch, I could not sufficiently rejoice that the proposal had been made. Its merit, however, I was fain to allow, rested entirely with the dear girl herself ; since the idea of going back to Hazleford, had originated in her own unprompted sense of delicacy ; and to me, belonged only the credit of having readily acceded to its reasonableness.

The quadrille was now over, and nothing delayed our departure but my mother's very natural reluctance to expose Philippa, who was heated by dancing, too suddenly to the outward air. We therefore still lingered—but without sitting down—without wishing to be any longer considered as belonging to the party. Blanch, who hovered near us, said that she would go to her own room the moment we left the house; and we were settling with her at what hour she was to hold herself in readiness for the carriage the next morning, when Sir Reginald at length re-appeared. He was followed by a tall meagre figure, more like a spectre than a living being; yet I instantly knew that it must be Mr. Tourberville, by his strong family likeness both to the Baronet and Lady Earlsford. To the former, indeed, his relationship seemed rather to be that of a brother than of a son; for he not only looked quite as old as his father, but infinitely more wasted and infirm. His eyes, deep sunk in his head, had neither lustre, nor even distinct colour; they looked blood-shot, heavy, and clouded. His hollow cheeks, his shrunk

form, his pale parched lips,—his stoop, and his evident shortness of breath, all excited the idea of a confirmed decline. Every body seemed impressed with consternation on beholding him. Nothing of the gay, airy, fascinating man of gallantry, remained in his appearance: to my apprehension, there was that in his face which proclaimed that his days were numbered; that he was tottering on the very verge of the grave. It was shocking, contemplating him in this light, to see him, with an air of levity, approach Lady Horatia, pay his compliments to her without the smallest embarrassment; and then, on being named by his father, bow, in a general way, to the rest of the company, and, with all the ease and unconcern of one conscious neither of vice nor folly, seat himself, and begin conversing with his nearest neighbours.

After a short but melancholy survey of an exterior as grievously injured as the mind within, I turned my eyes with some apprehension towards his father, and saw in his aspect all that it was natural to suppose would be stamped upon it by the spectacle

before us. He was pale—his brow was knit—his demeanour unalterably solemn; and when he spoke, his voice betrayed much remaining emotion, mingled, I thought, with a sentiment of shame—the too reasonable consequence of its total failure in his son. Altogether, it was a painful moment, and the impression which it made upon my spirits, did not wear off during the whole drive home. Sir Reginald parted from us with only a silent shake of the hand; Lady Horatia was not much more talkative—she seemed really heart-struck for her aged friend. Miss Tracy, whom we saw but for an instant in the hall as we passed through it, told us that her cousin Horace, finding his mother still very much discomposed, had attended her home, and perhaps would remain at Bovil Court all night.

Blanch followed us to the portico, and as my mother stepped into the coach, whispered to me: “Oh, how I envy you the happiness of returning to Hazleford! That ghastly phantom in the drawing-room is really awful!—I will see him, however, no more to-night, unless he pursues me in my dreams. But

remember me to-morrow, dearest aunt; at one o'clock, you know,—exactly at one.—Good night,—good night.”

As we drove off, Philippa eagerly begun:

“Poor Sir Reginald! What a shock he must have received! He is really much to be pitied. I never saw any body look so dreadfully ill as Mr. Tourberville does; he must be in a very dangerous, precarious state; do you not think so, ma'am? Do you not think that his life hangs by a thread?”

“Yes, my dear; every body must think so who sees him: but is that the reason you are pitying his father?”

“Why, just at present, I think it is. Mr. Tourberville's misconduct is of too ancient date to be a subject of peculiar regret to-night. It can be no novelty to Sir Reginald to have a dissipated son: but it must be a most unexpected aggravation to find that he has a dying one.”

“Without pretending to the stoical fortitude of a Spartan or a Roman matron,” replied my mother, “I must say, my dear Philippa, that were Mr. Tourberville *my* son, I should be apt to consider his sickly appear-

ance as one of the lightest evils for which I had cause to grieve. Even his past immorality of conduct would weigh almost as nothing, compared with his present effrontery—his veteran heartlessness—and that offensive display of ease and assurance which we have just been witnessing. From the moment that I heard there was a probability of his coming into the drawing-room to-night, I was well aware that his feelings could not be very acute; I therefore repressed all expectation of seeing in him any tremor or perturbation. But I was not prepared, I own, for a manner so perfectly disengaged;—an air of boyish sprightliness, which, even if his health had been unimpaired, and his character immaculate, would so ill have become his time of life. Taking all circumstances together,—his broken constitution,—his sullied fame,—his mature age,—and the thousand painful recollections which ought to have associated themselves with his return to East Vale, I do think that his re-appearance there this evening, has exhibited the most revolting picture that I ever was condemned to contemplate!”

We were all silent, for the justice of this representation, strong as it was, admitted of no dispute.

Martha, as it was reasonable to expect, had been gone to bed above an hour before we reached home. Lady Earlsford's carriage called for Jane Tourberville at eleven o'clock, and after conveying her back to Bovil Court, had proceeded to East Vale to bring away her aunt.

Poor Jane!—What will *she* feel when she sees her father?

We sent, according to appointment, for Blanch this morning; and when the coach returned, it brought not only her, but Miss Tracy.

She was come, she said, to negotiate a few amendments in the hasty arrangement agreed upon last night between Miss Stavordale and her mother: “I am come, in short,” she continued, “to entreat, that I may not be deprived of the society of my friend Blanch for more than two days;—that she may then

(I have already secured her own acquiescence) be permitted to revisit East Vale, where, I think, I can safely venture to promise her a much more satisfactory residence than she has hitherto enjoyed. Lord Glenmorne," she laughingly added, "is obliged, on Monday morning, to leave us for a week ; so that I shall have full liberty to have eyes, ears, and speech for any body else ;—and that *somebody* I am anxious should be Blanch : she is now my next best good.—Some of our tiresome personages are also going : Lord John Alcester, I believe, is one ; and certainly poor old prosy Lady Balfour, and her two frigid daughters. Mrs. St. Clair we cannot quite so soon get rid of : but that is no matter ;—she has her uses. Disagreeable men, who might want to talk to those who have no inclination to hear them, are sure to be well received by her ; she keeps them in play. She struck up an acquaintance last night with Mr. Tourberville, and began an extempore flirtation with him, that lasted, till, one by one, all the other ladies retired ; and the wax lights were nearly burnt out ; and Sir Reginald was fretted almost into a

fever. I dare say, she will take him off our hands again, quite as willingly, on every future occasion. During the day, we shall have but little trouble with him :—his mornings, I have learnt, nay, his noons, and *after-*noons, are all spent in bed. He never rises till two or three o'clock ; at least, never appears ;—and I do very confidently and joyfully expect, that his being an inmate at East Vale will inflict upon us no other annoyance than that of having to look at his cadaverous visage during dinner, and for a few hours afterwards between tea and bed time."

"It is a cadaverous visage indeed !" said my mother—"What madness to travel in such a state ! What madness to return to England just as winter is coming on,—just when he ought to have repaired to a southern climate !—What does Lady Horatia think of his looks, my dear Miss Tracy ?"

"She thinks, I dare say, that they are as good as he deserves ! but she does not utter her thoughts so unguardedly as I do : she only sighs and groans over the shock which he has inflicted upon Sir Reginald. She pictures to herself all the impending horrors

for him, of a son's death-bed scene;—of a funeral procession to the family vault;—of a house full of servants in deep mourning,—in short, of every thing that is tragical and gloomy, and suited to make English people, if it should happen in the month of November, hang, drown, or shoot themselves. And Mr. Tourberville seems determined to give us the fairest chance of seeing these dismal visions realized. He denies being ill; refuses medical advice; perseveres in drinking wine and keeping late hours; is insensible of his own hideously-changed looks, and will probably cut the matter short, and devote us to spleen and a halter before November actually sets in.”

Seeing Blanch and me look a little scandalized at this light manner of treating so awful an event, Miss Tracy, assuming a graver aspect, said: “Do not condemn—do not suspect me of callousness—wickedness—every thing that is detestable, because I have spoken of this wretched man's probable demise with so little feeling. The fact is, that his conduct last night, after you left East Vale,

gave the finishing stroke to the ill opinion which I have been brought up to entertain of him. He drank—he rattled—he made love to Mrs. St. Clair—he treated his father with careless disrespect—he allowed himself such liberties of speech that every young woman present was glad to get out of the room,—and evinced, altogether, such confirmed grossness of character, that it would be mere hypocrisy to affect any species of interest or concern for him. I am shocked that so many idle, gossiping people, should have been spectators of his vulgar improprieties: but, otherwise, I care no more for him, than for any other low, vicious miscreant it might be my ill fate to meet with.”

“Then, my dear Miss Tracy,” said my mother, very earnestly, “instead of asking me to let Blanch revisit a house haunted by so unworthy a tenant, consent to quit it yourself as often as you can—consent to indulge us with the pleasure of seeing you *here* whenever you are able, and give up all idea of meeting my grand-daughter any more, at present, under Sir Reginald’s roof. Your description of his son’s behaviour is so abo-

minable, that I really think no modest young person ought to be voluntarily and unnecessarily thrown into his society."

How did I love my mother for this firm and open declaration!—It met, however, with warm opposition from the others—not from Blanch, but from Miss Tracy and Philippa. The first was loth to resign the hope of regaining her young friend as an inmate;—and the second was most reluctant to give up the chance of future gaieties at East Vale. But my mother, though grateful and polite, was steady in adhering to her recent decision; and Helen, too well-bred to press the matter beyond a certain point, not only submitted, after a time, with a good grace, but promised to obtain Lady Horatia's leave to spend the whole of Monday with us, and to be as much here as possible during the ensuing week. Horace, she told me, in a low voice, would be delighted at the change of plan. He was by no means an advocate for the return of Blanch, at this juncture, to East Vale: "I almost quarrelled with him at breakfast," added she, "for the satisfaction which he shewed on hearing that she was

going away. But, poor fellow—I ought to have been glad that he had any cordial to cheer him, for he is very uncomfortably circumstanced. His mother frets him to the soul by the irritation of spirits to which she is giving way on account of the sudden return of Charles Tourberville. She cannot endure the idea of meeting him ;—she calls him the murderer of her friend ;—she terrifies herself with strange imaginations as to his future intentions respecting Jane ;—fancies that he will take her abroad, and marry her to a foreigner ; or make her live with him, and treat her harshly, or introduce her to improper acquaintance. She is, in short, making herself completely miserable ; and the danger is, that she will infuse so much alarm and repugnance into the weak mind of poor little Jane, that it will half kill her to be obliged to go through a presentation to her father. Horace thinks, that by being just now at Bovil Court he should do good, and wishes extremely to make such an arrangement : but Sir Reginald, quite as much distressed as Lady Earlsford, and far more justly, cannot bear to part with him. Your

heart would ache, Lady Stavordale," concluded Miss Tracy, aloud, "could you see how unhappy—how mortified—how crushed the venerable Baronet looks! The business of last night seems to have accumulated, in a few hours, a weight of years upon his head, that has now given him the full appearance of what he hitherto has never resembled—a decided old man. He came into the breakfast-room to-day, with an aspect so careworn, so furrowed;—the usual uprightness of his figure and walk had given way to a bend of such mingled weakness and despondency, that neither my mother, Horace, nor I could contemplate him without the deepest concern. It is, indeed, horrible for him to find, that a son, for whom he had, some years ago, as much cause to blush as any parent could well support, should, at the end of that time, have returned so infinitely worse than he went, that the glow of former shame must appear, in the recollection, faint—cold—inanimate, compared to the deep dye of present disgrace!"

We participated sincerely in her feelings of compassion for the unfortunate father, and

whilst we were still talking of him, and of East Vale, Miss Tracy's servant on one horse, leading another upon which there was a side-saddle, and Lord Glenmorne, mounted as her escort, appeared before the windows. She took leave of us for the day; and much pleased to have regained Blanch, we determined, if possible, to speak no more of the Tourbervilles, till they had furnished us with something new to say.

Blanch and I had been walking through the village after dinner, yesterday, and in the course of our ramble, had passed the cottage of a poor old disabled labourer, whom we often visit, and whom, having heard that he was more than usually indisposed, I stopped to inquire after, and promised to supply with a little wine, and a few other comforts, which his increased infirmities seemed peculiarly to require. For this purpose, on my return home, I went to speak to Clavering in the housekeeper's room; and there, somewhat to my surprise, I found a spruce, fo-

reign looking, second-rate sort of beau, in earnest conversation with her. He started up, a little confused, I thought, on seeing me; and Clavering, speaking to him in Italian, and addressing him by the name of Signor Antonio, thanked him for the letter which he had taken the trouble to bring her, and without much ceremony, bade him good evening. Signor Antonio understood the hint; bowed, and went away.

It was a matter of course, when he was gone, that I should ask who he was and whence the letter came which he had brought to her?

“Why, from a person, Ma’am, that I don’t care a straw about, and never had either wish or expectation to hear from again. Signor Antonio is valet to Mr. Tourberville: he once lived with an English family that was travelling through Italy and Switzerland; and, whilst I was at Florence with my late dear Mistress, Miss Blanch’s mamma, I got a little acquainted with a young woman, his fellow-servant, who was waiting-maid to his master’s lady. It is from this girl, who is now at Paris, that Antonio thought it

worth his while, when he was coming to England, to take charge of a letter for me. I cannot imagine how they either of them found out where I was, for I have never seen or heard any thing about them since I left Florence. But a stranger circumstance than that is, their knowing, at least, Antonio's knowing, that I brought over with me a sealed packet, which in my way through London, I left, at my master's desire (your brother, Ma'am, I am speaking of), at the house of a gentleman, a lawyer, I believe, into whose hands I was directed to place it, and to say nothing of the matter to any body. I strictly obeyed these orders, and delivered the packet to the gentleman without even telling Miss Blanch, whom I left in the chaise at his door, what the business was that had induced me to alight. And, for fear of accidents, I asked him to give me an acknowledgment, to certify my having faithfully discharged my trust, and then drove away. From that day to this, I never mentioned what passed to any human soul."

"And yet," said I, "did this Antonio appear to know the whole transaction?"

“ He knows, Ma’am, that there *were* such papers, and that they were confided to me ; but he cannot make out what I did with them ; and his object in coming here, I do believe, was to gain intelligence from me on that point. He went to work very artfully, and if I had not been made a little distrustful by his over-acted civility, I might have been betrayed into telling him the whole state of the case. But it struck me, whilst he was talking, that he was employed as an agent by some interested person to sift me ; and as he could not be brought to account for what he already knew, though trying hard to gain further information from me, I grew impatient, and was on the point of bluntly telling him, that he was asking questions about an affair which no way concerned him, and that I was determined not to satisfy such unjustifiable curiosity. You came in, however, Ma’am, just as the words were on my lips ; so the gentleman is gone away without positively knowing what I would have told, or what concealed. If the case is as I suspect, there is little doubt but he will be here again in a day or two, endeavouring

to tamper with me afresh, and then I shall take leave to tell him a piece of my mind."

I highly approved the good sense and integrity with which she *had* acted, and still *meant* to act; and then added, "Have you looked at the letter which he brought you, Clavering? Is there nothing in it which might furnish a clue to his motives?"

"Not a word, Ma'am; I opened it whilst he was here, thinking, as you do, that I should perhaps find out, as I read it, what inducement he could have to be so inquisitive. But the letter is a mere blind, and I dare say, was only written to give him an excuse for calling upon me. All it contains, is an enquiry after my health, and an assurance that the writer is well, and longing to return to England."

It would have been superfluous, clear-headed and cautious as Clavering had proved herself, to give her any injunction as to her future conduct. I therefore was content to renew my commendations of her prudence; and after talking over the situation of the old sick cottager, and settling with her what should be sent to him, she and I parted.

The affair, however, rests upon my mind ; but is so obscure, so wholly unintelligible to me, that I can give it no sort of connection with any thing or any body I ever knew or heard of before. Can it be, that Mr. Tourberville is Antonio's employer ? That seems the most rational conjecture. But does he know my brother ? and, if he does, what advantage does he expect to derive from learning where this " sealed packet " is deposited ? Do its contents relate to any pecuniary transaction ? Has George ever been rich enough to lend him money ? It is just possible, that after a flush of good luck at the card table, he may have had the means of assisting a friend or acquaintance with a seasonable supply : George was always open-handed ; considering his personal extravagance, indeed, *too* open-handed to people he cared very little about, and often found himself duped by. This packet may be a proof of it ; it may inclose an acknowledgment of the debt, and Mr. Tourberville may have his own reasons for wishing to gain possession of it. But, could he be so base as to meditate its destruction ? Bad as his deportment and

manners are, let me still hope, that his sense of honour—his feelings as a gentleman, are not yet so totally annihilated ! Let me hope that, in fact, he has no concern with what Antonio has been attempting.

My father has been slow in resolving to call upon Mr. Tourberville ; but, at last, hearing that Mr. Westcroft, and some other gentlemen in the neighbourhood, had conformed with the established usage on such occasions, he went to East Vale this morning, and did as the others had done ; that is, enquired for Mr. Tourberville, heard that he was not visible, left his name, and rode away again.

For the first time since the arrival of his cousin, Mr. Tremayne made his appearance here this afternoon. There was much for us to ask, and he satisfied our curiosity very readily. The interview so dreaded by Jane Tourberville, took place between her and her father two days after his return. Lady Earlsford could not be prevailed upon to be.

present at it, and poor Jane owed all her support, at so trying a moment, to Mr. Tremayne. She behaved, upon the whole, with tolerable firmness; nothing in her father's conduct, indeed, tended to work upon her sensibility. He was himself perfectly unmoved; said very little to her, and after she had been five minutes in the room, appeared to forget her entirely, and directed his whole conversation to her companion. Jane's penance lasted about half an hour: the father and daughter then separated, and nothing seems more uncertain than when they may meet again.

“And this,” said my mother, “being the state of his paternal feelings, and those which he has manifested as a son being hardly a degree warmer, what reason does he assign, Mr. Tremayne, for so precipitate a return to connexions whom it is obvious he so little regards?”

“It is not for me to question him on such a subject, dear Madam. He has long received every encouragement to re-visit his family; and whether he comes by appointment, or arrives unawares, he has equal rea-

son to suppose himself a privileged and welcome individual in his father's house."

"All that would be true, if he had come amongst you with better manners, and kinder affections."

To this Mr. Tremayne made no answer; and before any new subject of conversation could be started, Mrs. Crosby was seen approaching the house; and presently after was ushered into the room.

"Oh, my Lady," she cried, breathless with eagerness, and scarcely allowing herself time to answer our civil enquiries, "what a shocking thing has happened! I foretold how it would be. Poor Dr. Dulverton!—Mr. Crosby was called up to him at three o'clock this morning, and before seven it was all over! I knew nothing of the matter till about two hours ago—Mr. Crosby could not come home sooner, having several other patients to visit; but as soon as he told me what had taken place, I set off for Bovil Court to announce the event to Lady Earlsford. I thought her Ladyship ought to hear of it one of the very first, on account of that dear, good Mr. Lloyd, whom she is so fond

of, and who, I always understood, was, in a manner, promised the Living whenever it should drop. But, Lord bless me, Mr. Tremayne! What can be the matter with your honoured mother? she was as cold, and as indifferent about it! And Miss Tourberville had been crying; and my Lady, I thought, looked half ready to cry also; and yet she seemed angry too, and spoke of Mr. Lloyd." . . .

"My dear Mrs. Crosby," calmly interrupted Mr. Tremayne, moving his chair nearer to the window, "I beg your pardon for breaking into your story; but will you come and see what is the matter with my hand?—I suspect there is a splinter in it; and you who, next to your husband, are the cleverest surgeon in the county, will take it out for me in a moment. Ask Miss Blanch to lend you a needle, or a pen-knife."

"A pen-knife, indeed, Mr. Tremayne!—Mercy! how can you think I would use a pen-knife for such a thing?—No, no;—give me a needle, young ladies;—a longer one than that, if you please, Miss Blanch.—Aye, this will do;—this is just the right size;—

the other was not big enough to allow me to have a fair hold of it. A great deal depends upon keeping the needle steady.—But—dear me, I can do nothing without my spectacles, and I am sadly afraid I have not got them in my pocket!—Oh yes—here they are:—not my best pair, though, unluckily;—I do not see quite so well with these, as with my silver-mounted ones: but, I dare say, I shall be able to manage very well;—and if the splinter lies deep, we must apply a poultice, and that will draw it out.”

“Or have recourse to younger eyes, perhaps, Mrs. Crosby,” said Mr. Tremayne, smiling; “you to direct, and Miss Blanch to operate;—would not that be the best way?”

“Oh, no, no,—not me—not me!” cried the shrinking Blanch; “I am sure my hand would shake; I am sure I should do mischief!—I have such a horror of every thing that in the least resembles an operation!—Pray do not let me do it!”—And she really looked sick at the mere thought of such an undertaking.

“Gracious me!” exclaimed Mrs. Crosby,

quite amused at the earnestness of her entreaties, “who would have thought, my dear Miss Blanch, of your being such a poor little chicken-hearted thing?—Why, you behaved so well when the wooden bridge broke down, that I fancied you had the courage of a lion!”

“If I behaved well then, Mrs. Crosby, it was because there was nobody else at hand to do what seemed requisite. The case is very different now, you know.”

“Yes, yes,—that is true enough;—there is no denying the truth of that.—So, please to let me look at your hand, sir, and I will soon tell you whether I can do it any good or not.”

The examination then began; and whilst it was proceeding, I heard Mr. Tremayne, who was seated very near my drawing-table, say in a low voice to Mrs. Crosby, “Do not talk any more of Bovil Court, till you and I leave the house.” She caught his meaning; nodded; looked pleased at having been spoken to so confidentially; and then, in a facetious accent, said, “Upon my word, Miss Blanch, I do not think you need have

been so scared at the idea of undertaking such an operation as this!—Mr. Tremayne is more frightened than hurt, I fancy; and not much of either!—I can find no splinter, nor any thing like a splinter!”

“That *must* be the fault of your spectacles,” cried Mr. Tremayne, trying to look grave; “you should never come out without having your ‘best pair’ in your pocket. You do not know what may, some time or other, be the consequence of such carelessness.”

“Perhaps,” said Blanch, who began to perceive that there was nothing very serious the matter, “perhaps the fault is in the needle; perhaps it is blunt-pointed, and Mrs. Crosby cannot make it probe deep enough.”

“Will *you* try what you can do with it?” cried Tremayne, taking the little instrument from Mrs. Crosby, and holding it out to Blanch—“You are more skilled than you affect to be in the practice of wounding:—would it not be generous, then, for once, to apply that skill to the purpose of healing—a *hand*, at least?—Poor bleeding *hearts* must shift for themselves!”

“You had better not trust me; for, since I find that your sufferings are, in fact, so slight, I should have no mercy upon you!”

“Well, then, Mrs. Crosby,” resumed he, “as I can extract from these ladies no compassion, and you can extract from my hand no splinter, I think that we may as well give up the experiment. Thank you for your friendly intentions,—and thank you, fair Blanch, for your blunt-pointed needle.”

Soon after this, Mrs. Crosby, as abrupt when departing, as when arriving, arose, saying:—“Well, I must be going. I am glad to see you all so well, ladies;—very glad, my lady, to hear so good an account of Sir Geoffrey.—Shall be delighted, Miss Blanch, to send you some cuttings of those pretty geraniums which you admired so much when you and your aunt called yesterday. This is just the right time to set them. You must plant them in good fresh garden mould, and not expose them to the night air.—Oh,—and if you like, I can send you a few remarkably fine hyacinth roots.—No robbery at all;—oh, no;—I am always glad to meet with

folks who are as fond of gardening as I am myself. Good morning—good morning.—I hope you will call again soon :—Miss Philly never honours me——Oh, don't look shocked,—don't apologize, for I am never affronted. What's the use of taking affront against one's neighbours?—You can find better amusement, I dare say, than coming to me ; for you do not care half so much about flowers and plants as Miss Blanch. You are very right, then, to stay at home.—What, are you going too, Mr. Tremayne ?”

Mr. Tremayne was very sorry to make so short a visit ; but business now called him away. In a cautious *aside*, however, addressed to me, he added : “ Perhaps I shall see you again in the evening. If my conjectures as to what has occurred at Bovil Court are correct, there will be much for me to tell you.”

“ Of a pleasant description, I hope ?”

He looked towards Blanch with a glow of delight ; his very soul was in his eyes, as he hastily answered : “ I am ashamed of myself for feeling *how* pleasant,—how *more* than

pleasant,—how joyful, that will be to me, which, I fear, will only bring to others embarrassment and distress !”

And with this mysterious, but not wholly disheartening speech, he hastened out of the room, and we soon saw him walking towards the village with Mrs. Crosby, followed, at some distance, by his groom and horses.

“ Blanch,” cried Philippa, when the room was quiet again, and we had resumed our several occupations, “ how do you like the ingenuity with which Mr. Tremayne contrived, just now, to silence Mrs. Crosby when she had got upon a subject which he did not wish her to pursue ?—Do you admire these ready inventive faculties ?—Is this the sort of adroitness that suits your high-soaring notions of inflexible sincerity ?”

“ Far from it,” replied Blanch ; “ I think Mr. Tremayne would have done a great deal better, had he, *tout bonnement*, asked her to talk of something else. But I am not quite sure that he did not, at first, really imagine that there was something the matter with his hand.”

“ He acted his part so well, that we must *all* have thought so at the moment : but it is impossible that you should believe it now ; it is impossible that you should continue to believe, that a hand which had not the faintest scratch upon it, could ever have given him the sort of uneasiness which a thorn or a splinter occasions !”

“ I should like to understand, my dear Philippa,” said I, “ what pleasure you can derive from endeavouring to represent his conduct in so distorted a point of view ? Why was Mr. Tremayne, either to let a prating, though well-meaning woman, go on detailing the private concerns of his mother’s family, or else to mortify her by abruptly imposing upon her a necessity to talk only of what he pleased ? Was it not more humane, more delicate,—her inferiority to himself considered—to check her by less hasty, less authoritative means ? If Blanch is so absurdly scrupulous as to torture such a proceeding into a fault, I shall not easily forgive her !”

“ My dearest aunt,” cried she, with ani-

mation, "you have given so happy, and so natural an explanation of what passed, that instead of accusing, I think I must admire him."

"Come here, child, and let me kiss you," cried my mother, exultingly, "You have answered just as I could have wished! You have answered with candour and heart!"

"And very candidly proved," said Philippa, with a calm sneer, "that speculative and practical principles are extremely apt to differ!"

"It were to be wished," retorted my mother, "that they did not, in *some* instances, correspond too exactly! 'That they did not *both* contribute to the refinement of the most unprovoked and unqualified ill-nature!"

Mr. Tremayne came again yesterday evening, as he had given me reason to expect that he would; and, to our surprise, came accompanied by Lord John Alcester, and

Mr. Elsmere. We had been led to suppose by Miss Tracy, that Lord John was upon the point of leaving East Vale; but it appears that his departure is now deferred till that of Mr. Elsmere, whose friend Tremayne (looking from the moment of his entrance, happier than we could any of us account for his appearing) told me in a whisper, that "Lord John had professed himself so charmed by the vocal powers of my sister, and so little gratified by the present mode of passing the evenings at East Vale, that he would not be denied the indulgence of an introduction here. And, I am not so much afraid of him, now, in *that* quarter," glancing a smiling look at Blanch, "as I have been."

Philippa was a most enviable person during this triumphant evening. She looked remarkably handsome; she was in brilliant spirits; she had one beau to sing *with*, and another to sing *for*; she engrossed the almost exclusive attention of each, and furnished Mr. Tremayne and me with exactly the opportunity which we wanted of retreating into another room without being ques-

tioned or observed. He besought me to engage Blanch to accompany us;—I succeeded; and we took refuge in the library.

After some preface to prepare us for a narrative which nothing, he said, but its being upon the ever-interesting subject of *love* could recommend to our attention, he proceeded (in substance, though not in words), to give us the following relation :

Soon after his return to Bovil Court, subsequent to the illness which had detained him here so long, various circumstances obtruded themselves upon his notice, which seemed to indicate a growing attachment between Jane Tourberville and Mr. Lloyd. Lady Earlsford, by leaving Jane so much to herself, whilst daily attending upon her son at our house, had afforded the youthful pair such easy and frequent opportunities of being together, that, insensibly, the desire grew upon them of never being asunder. The fair maiden, it is to be presumed, was, at first, influenced merely by idleness, and the necessity of having somebody to speak to : but the encouragement which she gave, soon became of a more flattering nature, and war-

ranted Mr. Lloyd to lay serious siege to her heart. That heart, soft as wax, easily yielded to the impression conveyed to it through her eyes. His handsome person, now continually in her view;—his pleasing manners;—his successful efforts to relieve her from the weariness of having nothing to think of, and no object of pursuit, wrought her up to the highest pitch of sensibility and admiration of which her feeble character was capable. No toil, it is universally allowed, is so hard, as that of furnishing amusement to a person of weak understanding. If it *is* to be done at all, it must be effected by dint of very superior talents;—and what an employment for such talents! So prone, however, is human nature to self-complacency, that numberless have been the instances of men possessed of the brightest parts, who have become vain of the ability of serving as a peg for a fool to hang her tediousness upon!—Such, gradually, was the case with Mr. Lloyd. Seeing his statue daily acquiring more animation, he grew, like Pygmalion, enamoured of his work, and with secret pride, attributed the metamorphosis to the

collision between the vigorous powers of his own mind, and the dormant faculties of hers, never before so judiciously called into action. Every cheering smile which he substituted upon her face for the languor of indolence, acted in the double capacity of a lure to his heart, and a gratification to his vanity. That smile was an indication of tenderness,—and that tenderness never could have been awakened, in one so vapid and listless, except by him!—Mr. Tremayne's suspicions, once aroused, were not easily laid asleep; and a man who is himself in love, is a good judge of the signs of that passion in another. He soon saw enough in the mutual intelligence of their glances, and heard enough in the softened accents of their voices, to convince him, that the surmises to which previous indications had given birth, were not unfounded. Lady Earlsford, he perceived, had detected nothing; and he well knew how material it was to both parties still to avert from them her observation. Yet, as a reprieve from further importunity respecting his own alliance with Jane, he could not but rejoice at the bent which her affections had taken.

There was nothing in the choice which she had made, disgraceful to her taste, or offensive to propriety. He knew, however, what a shock it would inflict upon his mother; and was not without apprehension, that it would operate as a death-blow to the feeble endurance, rather than regard, extended towards her by Sir Reginald: he dreaded also the indignation which it might create in her father. To procure any benefit to himself, Mr. Tremayne was too noble-minded to stand passively by, and suffer a young man of so much merit as Lloyd,—a girl so harmless as Jane, to draw down upon themselves such almost certain ruin as would ensue either from a run-away marriage, or a longer indulgence of their secret attachment under the very roof, where, if it was discovered, it would call forth the heaviest condemnation. He therefore, with all the delicacy which the case required, set before the poor lover a representation of the obstacles which opposed themselves to the success of his suit; recommended to him a temporary removal from Bovil Court; professed the most sincere and undiminished friendship for him; and ended

by assuring him, on his most solemn word of honour, that in all which he had said, he had been actuated by feelings perfectly disinterested,—since Jane neither *was*, nor ever *would* be to him an object of warmer regard than a sister or a cousin. Mr. Lloyd had the good sense and the gratitude to hear him with conviction and temper. He acknowledged the force of his friendly arguments; promised to absent himself for a season from Lady Earlsford's, and was furnished by Mr. Tremayne with a plausible motive to assign for his departure, and with an object to set out upon. He suggested to him a plan of English travel for the improvement of his pupil, and offered to prepare both the Viscountess and Sir Reginald to approve the scheme. Mr. Lloyd subscribed with melancholy resignation to all that he proposed; and they parted—with mutually amicable dispositions towards each other,—and, on Mr. Tremayne's side, with sentiments of the truest pity for his unresisting victim:—*A fellow feeling makes one wondrous kind!*

“This interview,” proceeded he, “took

place the very day previous to my long conversation with you, dear Miss Stavordale, in your father's pleasure-grounds. My mind had admitted a gleam of hope—faint, indeed, and distant—that circumstances might hereafter so concur with the wishes both of Lloyd and myself, as to enable him to secure the hand of Jane without positive detriment to either. The living of Storriton, held by Dr. Dulverton, was in the gift of my uncle, and, I well knew, had long been intended for Earlsford's tutor. There was little prospect that the present incumbent would survive the winter: the preferment was of considerable value; Lloyd had some private fortune, though not much; and Jane, in right of her mother, was entitled to a few thousand pounds, which must devolve to her on her coming of age, even if her father and grandfather chose to make her marriage with a country clergyman an excuse for casting her off, and refusing to add to her portion. I longed to communicate these promising circumstances to you. I was all impatience—(when this sweet Blanch gave me so intelligibly to understand, that there could be no

hope for me whilst my mother refused to sanction my addresses)—I was all impatience to tell her, how soon the time might arrive when that sanction would cease to be withheld. Yet the recollection that it was still but too probable Jane and Lloyd might eventually be parted, and that, in such a case, I should severely reproach myself for having betrayed their attachment, checked me. Poor Jane, however, was often in danger of betraying *herself*; and it required all my vigilance, all my circumspection, to guard her from awakening suspicions which, had they not threatened to be prejudicial to her own cause, I should have been so truly rejoiced to confirm. The day before Lloyd left Bovil Court, she had so little command of herself, when dining at East Vale, that, on hearing his journey alluded to, she was very near bursting into tears. I called her back, by an admonitory look, to a sense of the danger that would attend such an exposure of her feelings, and the evil for that time was averted. But she was incurring perpetual risk of laying herself open to the inquiries and wonder of my mother. Her

spirits, never very buoyant, failed her so completely, that, unable in any other way to account for their depression, her aunt became more firmly persuaded than ever that *I* was the cruel disturber of her peace; that jealousy, and hopelessness of my affection, were undermining her health, and preparing for her the path to an early grave! I had much to bear in consequence of these unfounded aspersions. Jane, when privately listening to the indignant reproaches poured out against me—when exhorted to take courage, and told that *she* was the daughter of my mother's choice, and the only one whom her heart would ever admit—poor Jane dared not disavow the passion which she was supposed to entertain for me, lest the despondency which was now wholly ascribed to my barbarous coldness, should, with more dangerous sagacity, be imputed to any other prepossession. There was some merit, I hope you will allow, in bearing and forbearing as I did, under circumstances and accusations which, though in one sense ridiculous, in another were so unfit to be explained away, and so hazardous to silence."

“ Oh, do not praise yourself,” exclaimed the half-laughing Blanch, “ because it deprives me of the pleasure of doing it for you !”

There was so much sweetness mingled with the sauciness with which this was spoken, that Mr. Tremayne, instead of complaining of her severity, or beginning an elaborate defence of himself, snatched her hand, and before she could withdraw it, carried it eagerly to his lips. She remonstrated, though with a smile, and a little blush that did not indicate much anger, and urged him to go on with his history.

He resumed it again, to account for his hasty departure in the morning, when Mrs. Crosby quitted the house.

“ I anticipated,” pursued he, “ from what she was beginning to tell of the reception which my mother had given to her news respecting the rector of Storriton, that some premature discovery had taken place, and that Jane and Lloyd were in imminent danger of incurring the penalty so often attendant upon clandestine engagements. I could not, however, endure, till I knew the exact

degree of publicity which the affair might have obtained at Bovil Court, to let it be openly discussed at Hazleford;—and I followed the good lady to glean from her privately, whatever information she might be able to afford me. This was not much: she knew little more than she had already revealed;—and therefore escaping from her as speedily as I could, I mounted my horse, and galloped to Bovil Court. There I found that all was as I had surmised: Jane's secret was known, and she had herself, poor girl! been the luckless instrument of its disclosure. My mother had surprised her, either reading or writing a letter, received from or intended for Lloyd. The tears she was shedding over it drew forth a command to submit it to immediate inspection;—and when delivered, it told too intelligible a tale to be misunderstood. The anger, disappointment, and sorrowing surprise, which it excited, I need not enlarge upon.—All that could be said to soften and extenuate the affair, I urged most warmly: but my mother's mind was in a state of too much irritation to be influenced by my arguments. She

spoke of Lloyd with detestation,—reproved me severely for attempting to palliate his treachery; and protested that she would instantly write to Sir Reginald to supplicate him to change his intended disposition of the living. I continued my pleadings as long as there appeared the remotest chance of effecting any salutary purpose by them;—and then, whispering a few words of comfort to the disconsolate Jane, I posted back to East Vale, to try whether the credit which I possess with my uncle, could accomplish any thing more favourable to her cause.”

“How active and zealous you have been!” interrupted I.

“Do not ascribe to me much merit on that account!” answered he, smiling, “I had as important a point at stake for myself as for Jane; and my exertions, I assure you, were far from being disinterested.—At East Vale,” continued he, “the very indifference towards the poor girl, which had hitherto been her misfortune, on this occasion stood her friend. My uncle was, at first, startled, and considerably displeased, by what he termed the temerity and presumption of Mr.

Lloyd's pretensions. But after further consideration ; after calmly discussing the subject with me for nearly an hour, and hearing all that I had to say in the lovers' favour, he ended by promising to give him the living ; by promising to make up Jane's portion a clear ten thousand pounds ; and by consenting to their immediate marriage !"

" Is it possible !" cried Blanch, delighted, " Oh, how I love him for this kindness and liberality !"

" But what," enquired I, " said Mr. Tourberville to so unexpected a transaction ?"

" He left every thing to the decision of his father. *His* feelings respecting Jane are still more extraordinarily apathetic than even my uncle's. But I must not talk of Mr. Tourberville :—sufficient is the evil of being forced to think of him, and condemned to associate with him !"

" Does Lady Earlsford (but I scarcely need ask), does she know the result of your conference with her brother ?"

" She does : I have not been long returned from her. You may easily conceive, that her mortification and resentment, at this mo-

ment, are very great. Baffled in every point, obliged to renounce all hope of an alliance between Jane and me; compelled to permit the marriage with Lloyd; grieved, humbled, and, as she imagines, slighted and defied—nothing can be more comfortless than her present sensations. But time will tranquilize and sooth them; and time, I trust—time at no very remote distance—will give to her a daughter-in-law calculated to make every regret for the loss of Jane dwindle into nothing! Sweetest Blanch,” continued he, turning towards her with the tenderest earnestness, “my mother’s opposition to the suit which she has long known I have had so fervently at heart, is withdrawn! She consents to my offering that devoted heart to your acceptance. Can you—will you—most dear and precious Blanch—receive it? and give me your own in exchange?”

Trembling, agitated, yet glowing with joyful surprise, Blanch threw herself upon my bosom; and when able to speak (a power which she did not immediately attain), murmured out in broken accents, as she stretched forth to him her hand, but still hid her face.

upon my shoulder, "Tell him, dearest aunt, that I can—that I do—value his affection more than my existence!"

He caught the sense of these auspicious words, seized her extended hand, and whilst breathing over it his enraptured thanks, I gently disengaged myself from her arms, and glided out of the room.

Full of delight at such a termination of the conference, I hurried to my own chamber, saying as I went, in the words of Prospero—

"So glad of this as they I cannot be,
————— but my rejoicing
At nothing can be more."

The pleasure which I well knew would be felt by my father and mother, was, by anticipation, already heightening my own. The remembrance, however, that there were visitors in the drawing-room, prevented my going to them immediately with the welcome intelligence; and I reflected, likewise, that by prolonging my absence, I should secure Blanch from the suspicion of having been engaged in a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Tremayne; a circumstance, which, till the terms they

are upon shall be declared, might, in her estimation, be of some importance. But, elated far beyond my usual pitch, and dying for some participator in my happiness, I could not forbear—hearing Clavering's voice upon the stairs—opening the door, and calling her into my room.

I communicated to her the gratifying news. She was enchanted. “Oh, ma'am,” cried she, “this is just what I have been wishing and hoping would come to pass, ever since Mr. Tremayne was ill here in the summer! He was in love with Miss Blanch, ma'am, then; over head and ears in love; and made me talk of her for hours, whenever we could be by ourselves. There was not a circumstance of her past life that he did not, some how or other, contrive to draw from me. He knows exactly how she was brought up; what places she resided in; what company she mixed with. There is not a question, in short, which he could devise about her, that he left unasked. And when I described to him Miss Blanch's mamma, my late dear lady, he listened with *such* attention; and seemed so pleased at all the good I had to

say about her ; at the account I gave him of her fond and kind behaviour to the poor old blind gentleman, her father ; at the relation of her acts of charity, and of all the pains she took in the education of Miss Blanch. Oh, ma'am, I am sure that he has, from that time, loved the daughter the better for having learned to think so well of the mother !”

“ Upon my word, Clavering,” said I, laughing, “ you may pride yourself upon having been of extraordinary service to the cause.”

“ Oh, no, ma'am ; I cannot suppose that Mr. Tremayne would have loved her, probably, just as much, whether I had ever told him any thing about her family or not ; but he might not have had the same reliance upon the good principles in which she was brought up ; he might not have felt so well disposed to be a *friend* to Miss Blanch, as well as a *lover* ; for he did not want me always to be talking of her beauty ;—he wanted to hear about her temper, and favorite way of life ; and whether I thought that she could be happy to spend a great part of her time in the country ; and whether she

was fond of books; and a hundred other things, that shewed he was thinking of her as a rational companion, and not merely as a pretty, lively girl."

With more seriousness, I now answered, "You distinguish very judiciously, my worthy Clavering; and I have great pleasure in hearing my own hopes confirmed, by a person of such sound good sense. But now that we are by ourselves, tell me, have you seen or heard any thing more of Signor Antonio?"

"He was here this very evening, ma'am. I should have told you so the moment I saw you, if this charming news about Miss Blanch had not put every thing else out of my head."

"Well, did any thing more pass relative to the papers?"

"He is as cunning as a serpent, ma'am; but, somehow, I believe he begins to think, that he has met with his match. He came under pretence of merely asking me how I did, and requesting permission to sit and chat an hour or two; for, at East Vale, he complained, there was nobody he could speak

to, by reason of his being so indifferent an English scholar; and it was very dull to be always in company with people he could hardly make himself understood by. I could not deny the truth of what he said; and, to prevent his supposing that I mistrusted him, and meant to be particularly shy, I invited him to take a dish of coffee with me, and then began conversing as civilly and as cheerfully as I could. Still the bait did not take; he discoursed only upon general subjects; and I felt half tempted to think, that he really had no other motive for coming than the one which he had professed. At last, however, he rose to go; bade me good night, and had got as far as the door, when, turning and endeavouring to speak with a mighty undesigned air, he said, “By the by, Signora, your former master, Signor Stavordale, has lately been in correspondence with *my* master. They knew each other intimately some years ago; and Signor Stavordale, hearing, through some means or other, that my master was likely to return soon to England, procured his direction, and wrote to request, that as early as possible after having landed,

he would make enquiries concerning the safety of those papers which I was talking of the other day, and which you chose to give me such very evasive answers about. Of course, you delivered them, as directed, to the person who was to have the care of them? But why so reserved upon the subject? My master has some important documents of his own, which he would like very well, I dare say, to lodge in hands as trusty as those to which you have confided Signor Stavor-dale's. He has now been absent from England so long, that for such a purpose, he does not at all know who to apply to."

"Then let him consult his father, Signor," said I. "He will give him better information than can be obtained from a poor, ignorant domestic, like me. Meanwhile, I have no scruple in saying to you, that if any papers were brought to this country by me (mind, I say *if*, Signor, for you have no right to know positively how the fact was), I disposed of them according to the orders which I received. I know that they are safe; and never will tell you, nor your master, nor any

person out of this family, where they are. Now, are you answered, Signor ?”

“ He looked, as you may suppose, ma’am, a good deal disconcerted ; but made no further attempt to question me, and after a few moments hesitation, quietly departed.”

“ Can any thing be more strange,” cried I, “ than the mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of clumsiness and finesse, with which this man carries on his operations ? In coming to the point to-night, he was miserably deficient in plausibility, in adroitness, in every thing but impertinence, and the art of appearing really undesigning. From such agents we have little to fear, and Mr. Tourberville (if *he* is his employer) has nothing to hope. But, my good Clavering, I think it would have been better to have told him plainly where the papers are lodged. When once assured that you no longer have any controul over them, a circumstance which seems to excite doubt, he must have despaired of gaining access to them ; and an end would have been put to these disagreeable interrogations.”

“ Well, ma’am, we shall see what he will attempt next. It is most likely that I have not yet heard his last word about the matter.”

We now heard advancing steps in the gallery leading to my room ; and Clavering, opening the door a little way to observe who it was, descried Blanch, who, intending to proceed to her own chamber, was hastily passing on, unconscious that we were in that part of the house.

Clavering arrested her progress by advancing to meet her, and saying, “ My dear, blessed young lady, do pray come into your aunt’s room, and let me have the delight of wishing you joy.”

Blanch instantly stopped, and putting her arm affectionately round the worthy woman’s neck, answered with a look that was radiant with happiness, “ Ah, dear Clavering, I am indeed a blessed, blessed creature ! But your hearty congratulations will, if any thing can, add to my felicity. Clavering, we will never part ; you shall live with me wherever I go ; I will beg grandmamma to give you up to me ; and all that I can do to

repay your long and faithful attachment to my dear mother; your tender and willing services to myself, even from my childhood.—Oh, with what pleasure will I strive to perform it!”

Clavering's grateful thanks for these assurances, were cut short by the sudden glimpse which Blanch, who had now reached my door, obtained of me in the room within it. She flew towards me, and embracing me with the most caressing fondness, exclaimed, “Kindest of friends; my own dear, indulgent aunt, how warmly, I well know, do *you* participate in my unspeakable happiness! How much will it be increased by your becoming hereafter its witness. You have promised, Mr. Tremayne tells me, to be our very first visitor; and whenever I quit the dear home to which I now belong, you are already engaged, he says, to accompany me to the new one to which I am to be introduced. He fancies that the removal will at first dissatisfy me, because his house is old-fashioned, and not very cheerful in its appearance; and because it has no visiting neighbours within a nearer distance than two or three miles. But,

my dear aunt, what should I be made of—where would be my heart, my taste, my understanding, if, with *such* a companion, I could care about visitors, or trouble myself about the aspect of his house! Do you not think,” she continued, expressively smiling, “that he already more than half suspects, that, with him, even the gloomiest desert would be to me a region of delight?”

“I hope he does,” replied I; “I never knew a man who better merited to be blessed with so confiding an opinion of his mistress’s steadfast and genuine attachment. But where have you left him? Is he gone back into the drawing-room?”

“Yes, I believe he is. I was frightened away from him by my aunt Martha, who, not knowing that we were in the library, opened the door, looked quite scared when she beheld us, and immediately ran away, though I eagerly called after her, and felt completely ashamed of the abrupt retreat to which, as it appeared, the sight of us had compelled her?”

I laughed, saying, “Set your mind at rest, my dear Blanch; her own *gaucherie*—her

total want of presence of mind—compelled her to it.”

When we rejoined the party below stairs, we found some of the number at cards; and the rest, during a pause in the musical exertions of Philippa and Lord John, were assembled in a little knot round the piano-forte, talking with the fair performer, who, still in high glee, had scarcely, I believe, remarked our absence; and, moreover, had so well filled up the time, that nobody else had had leisure to observe it with greater attention than herself. Without intruding into her circle, Blanch and I seated ourselves at a small table near the fire, with our work. Mr. Tremayne soon joined us; and though not very loquacious—for great happiness, on being first attained, is more *felt* than *expressed*—yet did his looks convey to my mind a consciousness of the internal felicity of his, that no language was wanting to confirm. The *bracelet*, I soon saw, again encircled the arm from which it had lately, in compliment to him, been so voluntarily banished. I said nothing; but the congratulatory nod which I gave him was sufficiently

expressive ; and he replied to it by a smile denoting so much triumph at his little victory, that I was in some danger of envying the youthful feelings which could give to *such* a trifle so romantic a value.

He was obliged to depart without having had the possibility of holding a moment's conference with my father and mother. They had, in addition to the two gentlemen who came with him, Mr. and Mrs. Paulet to attend to ; and whilst we were in the library, Mr. Westcroft had come in. Cards had been the order of the evening, and rubber after rubber succeeded each other with such rapidity, that there had scarcely been the pause of a minute between the termination of the old, and the beginning of a new game. I was duly careful, however, that none of the family should retire to rest without being made acquainted with the *eclaircissement* which had taken place. My mother heard the tidings exactly as I had foreseen she would : with hearty and unqualified delight. My father expressed his satisfaction less volubly, but not less cordially, by bestowing upon Blanch the fondest embrace.

Philippa, flushed with new-born hopes, the produce of Lord John Alcester's attentions, bore the intelligence with heroic firmness, and offered her congratulations with very laudable graciousness. She has long foreseen this event, and known how totally out of the question were her own views upon Mr. Tremayne ; views, however, now, for a considerable time past, banished from her thoughts. Martha, ambitious to impress us with due respect for her dignity of *confidente*, hastened to assure us, when I spoke of the engagement between Miss Tourberville and Mr. Lloyd, that *she* had known the circumstance for several days ; in short, ever since the undisturbed evening which she had spent with Jane, the last time we were at East Vale. Observing something in our faces which she mistook for surprise at her having attained to such extraordinary honours, poor Martha began eagerly protesting that what she had told us was perfectly true ;—and was going on to state, in evidence of her veracity, sundry minute particulars which she felt persuaded we should all be obliged to acknowledge she could only have learned from

Miss Tourberville, when my mother, calmly interrupting her, said : “ Spare yourself all this trouble, Martha : there needs not a tenth part of it to convince me, that your poor Jane is not a greater simpleton in the ordinary occurrences of life, than in those which relate to the concerns of her heart ! I have *no doubt* that she entrusted you with the whole history of her—then—hopeless entanglement with Mr. Lloyd ; I have *no doubt* that she gratuitously placed her reputation in your power, after one or two casual interviews with you : she is just the sort of person from whom such folly was to be expected ; and all that I can say is, that I sincerely regret her having seen, that you were exactly a fit auditress to listen to her silly and indelicate communications. Do not indulge yourself, Martha, in feeling proud of having been selected to hear a girl tell things of herself which she ought *not* to have told : which no one but an enemy would deliberately have told of her : which Mr. Tremayne would have feared to disgrace her by confiding even to his aunt, or to Miss Tracy. Had not Jane thought you, notwithstanding

the difference in your ages, as deficient in judgment as herself, she would have been ashamed to have confided to you a secret, which, at that time, it was so essential, both to her fame and interest, to keep concealed. I hope the day *may* come, my dear, when you will be wise enough to think, that the honour of being made, like the reeds in heathen story*, the depository of a piece of intelligence which is only communicated to you to relieve the speaker's indiscretion, is not a compliment to be at all vain of."

If not benefited, Martha was, at least, abashed by this remonstrance, and stole off as soon as it ended, in silent mortification.

Blanch is becoming, in consequence of the predicament in which she is now generally understood to be placed, a personage of considerable importance. She has been honoured by a visit from all the principal connexions of the new family to which she

* See the Fable of Midas.

is soon to belong, including her future mother-in-law, who was here yesterday, and treated her with as much courtesy as we could reasonably expect. Jane accompanied her, and looked exceedingly perplexed how to rein in the smiles of conscious happiness which seemed perpetually struggling to exhibit themselves upon her face. Aware how little Lady Earlsford approves the source whence her present joyful feelings originate, she ventured not, openly, to indulge them, but maintained a contest the most ludicrous, and often the most unsuccessful, between assumed demureness and genuine hilarity. As a relief both to the aunt and the niece, whose residence together must now, assuredly, be any thing rather than a pleasure to either, we invited Jane to dinner. The application was most readily granted, and the simple, but harmless little bride-elect, remained to enjoy, for some hours, the supreme delight of being closeted with Martha, to talk over her past frights, and actual visions of felicity. How Martha can reconcile herself to the view of so much exultation at the idea of marrying *a parson*, I am by no means able to under-

stand. Parsons, an appellation which, in defiance of us all, she has persisted in applying to the whole race of clergymen, have hitherto—at least in the character of lovers, or as partners at a ball,—been her decided aversion. She may now, however, be beginning to think, that, possessed of good preferment, a handsome young clergyman is a creature who may be tolerated.

Blanch's conduct towards Lady Earlsford, throughout the whole visit, pleased us extremely, and gratified Mr. Tremayne in the highest degree. Instead of the civil indifference with which she has hitherto submitted to her ladyship's coldness and neglect, she manifested an unaffected desire to recommend herself to her regard; and paid her, with looks of softness and deference, every attention which could prove the gratitude which her consent to the alliance had excited; and the affection and respect, with which, as the mother of Tremayne, she was anxiously disposed to consider her. There is something very remarkable in the nice sense of propriety with which a few gifted minds appear to be intuitively endow-

ed; whilst others, with all that precept and example united can do for them, never attain beyond the heartless formulary of established etiquette. I am persuaded, that it requires not only kindness of disposition, but excellent good sense, to know *how*, and on what occasions, to exercise politeness. There *are* times, when, what is usually so termed would be impertinence and presumption. Blanch has more of that happy *tact* which teaches discrimination between the fit and the unfit, than almost any creature I have ever known, young or old. There was merit in the reserve with which she formerly behaved to Lady Earlsford. since it was evident that her assiduities would have been misconstrued and repulsed, as artful endeavours to insinuate herself into favour for the sake of Mr. Tremayne. There is still greater merit, now, in industriously seeking, both on his account and her own, to propitiate the parent who, she well knows, he so sincerely loves. The veil having fallen which so long blinded the viscountess to the inanity of poor Jane, may we not hope, that, ere long, the chosen of her son's heart will become as truly interest-

ing to her, as she had vainly flattered herself that she should always have found her niece?

The other visitors who came to do honour to their future relation, where Sir Reginald Tourberville, accompanied by Lady Horatia and Miss Tracy. It was the first time that we had seen the Baronet since the night of his son's return. He looked thin and pale; and, as he walked from his carriage up to the house, wore a striking air of depression. But at sight of Blanch, all traces of care and vexation vanished. His face kindled with joy, and his whole demeanour was full of animation, gallantry, affection, and pleasure. He folded her paternally to his bosom, calling her, "The child whom his heart had adopted;—the preserver first, and now, the generous rewarder of his long-valued and excellent Horace!"—He prognosticated, that her life would be as happy, as the highest sense of honour in the object of her choice, the most admirable temper, and the best cultivated understanding, could render it. Then, smilingly adverting to what had once passed in the music-room at East Vale, he thanked her for having so well complied with the ad-

vice which he had given her, and which he now archly enquired, whether she had followed to manifest her tractability, and benevolent wish to please him—or, to please herself?

“ Ah, dear Sir,” cried Blanch, blushing, but laughing, “ it was advice which, I am afraid, I had anticipated !”

Mr. Tremayne, who had been attending to Lady Horatia, now approaching them ; and, caught by the answer of Blanch, and the heightened bloom that accompanied it, entreated to be told, what the advice had been to which his uncle had alluded ?

“ It was something,” cried the Baronet, “ so strangely prejudicial to your interests, that I dare not stay to hear it communicated to you ;—so, my dear Sir Geoffrey, if you please, I will shelter myself from the indignation impending over me, in your study,—where I shall be very happy to be favoured with your company and protection.”

The two gentlemen then left the room ; and Blanch, refusing to gratify the curiosity of Mr. Tremayne, removed to the opposite

side of the fire place, and devoted herself entirely to Lady Horatia and her daughter.

Amongst the various subjects of conversation which were now started, the good fortune—where an estate was hereditary—of having it placed in a picturesque part of the country, for some time took the lead. Lady Horatia spoke of the house and grounds of Mr. Tremayne, in Herefordshire, the chief recommendation of which, she said, was their situation.

“You will like,” she added, addressing Blanch, “the walks and drives round Birchingtonhurst: but I warn you not to expect, that either from the building itself, or the style in which the land immediately surrounding it is laid out, your eye will derive the smallest pleasure. It was the bequest to my brother, the father of Horace, of a tasteless, but kind-hearted old bachelor uncle, who erected the dwelling himself, upon the scite of a much better one inhabited by his predecessors, but requiring, as he imagined, more money to repair, than a new one, on a smaller scale, would cost to construct. The fact is, he

wanted something to do. In turning architect, he gave full scope to his passion for trying effects, and produced, at the termination of a long series of years, spent in building, pulling down, and rebuilding,—the ugliest, the worst-proportioned, and most inconvenient edifice, that ever man was infatuated enough to be proud of. Its exterior—pardon me, dear Horace, for thus irreverently speaking of your paternal habitation—its exterior, without being gothic, is so inveterately antiquated, that no attempt to modernize it could possibly avail. My brother tried what could be done with its sloping roofs and gable ends, the first year or two after it came into his possession: but the work was so endless, and the effect produced so inadequate to its expensiveness, that he gave the matter up; resolving—if ever he should be rich enough—to pull down the whole unsightly mass, and substitute in its stead something entirely new. Riches, however, rarely ally themselves with the profession of a soldier, or the destiny of a younger brother. Birchinghurst, therefore, has descended, in all its original deformity, to its

present possessor, who, as well as the fair mistress, with whose presence it will soon be honoured, must make the best of it, and prove to the world, that

‘ Fixed to no spot is happiness sincere,—

‘ ‘Tis no where to be found, or every where.’—

Blanch listened to this formidable account with undismayed looks, directing, now and then, a smile towards Mr. Tremayne, which seemed to set all the horrors of *gable ends* and *sloping roofs* completely at defiance. Miss Tracy, meanwhile, much amused, and anxious to hear more, reminded her mother, that she had hitherto only spoken of the *exterior* of the place, and besought her to give us some idea of the *interior*.

“ Have you then,” said Blanch, surprised, “ never seen it ?”

“ Never :—I have heard it talked of in a general way, as a most delectable abode, but I never was there, nor ever heard it minutely described.”

“ Ah, my dear Helen,” exclaimed Mr. Tremayne, with an air of well-affected commiseration, you little know what awaits

yourself!—Lord Glenmorne, I presume, has given you no account of his own residence?”

“Why, surely it must be better than Birchinghurst?”

“For your sake, I might be generous enough to wish that it were. It is certainly more magnificent: but what will you say, when I tell you, that it is seated either in, or very near, the fenny district of Kesteven in Lincolnshire!”

“Miss Tracy, for a moment, looked a little blank: but, quickly recovering herself:—“Well,” she cried, “if that is the case, we must always be supplied with ample stores of Peruvian bark to keep off agues!—There is no such thing as transplanting a man’s house as you would a vine-tree, or a strawberry plant, from one country to another.”

“Very true:—but to make you amends for the stubborn immobility of Lord Glenmorne’s mansion, you will find yourself furnished, by the very nature of its situation, with a most interesting source of amusement in the constant occupation it will necessitate of draining, and banking your land to ward off inundations,—to prepare it for the la-

bours of the husbandman,—and to promote the salubrity of the air. How infinitely more beneficent and meritorious will such employments be, than those idle and selfish ones usually resorted to by fine ladies in the country, of laying out flower-gardens, constructing arbours, or excavating grottoes !”

“ Your *persiflage*, my dear Horace,” said Miss Tracy, laughing, “ is now become too palpable to frighten me any longer : but I own, that, at the beginning, you *did* scare me abominably. All that I now believe of your story is, that Lord Glenmorne’s estate is somewhere in Lincolnshire ;—I utterly discredit the fens, and morasses, and inundations, with which you have decorated it ;—and, as for its vicinity to the formidable district (with a name which I have already forgotten) you have so obligingly appointed for my future scene of action, I am just as incredulous on that point as on all the others.”

“ But why should you, who were willing to take such pains to prepare Blanch for the miseries of Birchinghurst, be so reluctant to profit from my friendly endeavours to familiarize you, by previous description, to the

little imperfections of your own approaching home?"

"The retaliation," cried Lady Horatia, "is very fair. But *I* deserved, more than Helen, the fright, which, for a moment, the plausible and demure fable excited. Let me now, to cheer the impression which my unfavourable description of the house at Birch-inghurst may have made, repeat, that the country around it is truly beautiful; and that, with all its disadvantages, of ill-distributed rooms, intricate passages, and perpendicular stair-cases, it is preferable, for a thousand reasons, to many of the best-planned, and best-built edifices in England."

"Does this voluntary, though tardy, concession," said Mr. Tremayne, addressing Blanch, "relieve you, in some degree, from the panic into which all that preceded it must have thrown you?"

"I shall not," cried she, "answer that question—no very necessary one, I should imagine!—till you have told us, whether the whole history of those vile bogs in Lincolnshire was a mere invention of your own?"

He laughed, though evidently under some

apprehension of incurring a remonstrance, and said: "By no means; the only circumstance in my description that was a little hypothetical, was the vicinity of these Kesteven fens to the Glenmorne estate. That the fens themselves exist (though yearly undergoing improvements, which, in process of time, must convert them into fertile and profitable land) is beyond a question."

"Blanch," cried Miss Tracy, "you must really cure him of this ingenious turn for hypothesis. You see with what a grave face he can deal in the art of mystification. This, I assure you, is far from being the first time that he has imposed upon my easy credulity."

"And poor Mrs. Crosby," said my mother, laughing at the recollection, "could make the same complaint!"—She then told the story of the feigned splinter in his hand; and whilst Miss Tracy was scolding him, and I was exerting myself in his defence, Sir Reginald and my father re-appeared.

They had scarcely, however, taken their seats, when an additional visitor, and one, I believe, not very acceptable to any of the

party—was announced, in the person of Mr. Tourberville. He entered the room with that sort of under-bred ease, which men, even of the best family and education, may contract, by long association with dissolute companions. His gestures, his expressions, his very looks were offensively cavalier; and nothing mitigated the disgust which they were calculated to inspire, except the wretched appearance of ill-health, more strikingly impressed upon his whole person than ever, that forced itself upon the observation, and involuntarily called forth the compassion of every beholder. In addition to all the other symptoms of disease which we had perceived on the night of his arrival, we now heard at intervals a short and hollow cough, and saw on each cheek a patch of hectic, contrasting most fearfully, the one with his revolting sprightliness, and the other with the livid paleness of his general complexion. Sir Reginald, from the time that he entered, scarcely unclosed his lips. He looked, as I am told is nearly always the case when his son is present, as if divided between indignation and anguish. Lady Horatia was calm,

but evidently disinclined to converse. Miss Tracy, Blanch, and Mr. Tremayne almost immediately went out to walk in the shrubbery ; Philippa, a little conciliated by observing that the new visitor frequently looked at her, kept her seat to avoid depriving him of so agreeable an object of contemplation ; and my mother and I, though deemed worthy, as you will readily believe, of no such flattering notice, did our best to assist my father in supporting the irksomeness of having a guest to attend to, so little suited to his taste.

The pleasantest circumstance connected with the visit was its shortness. In less than fifteen minutes, Mr. Tourberville arose, enquiring, however, before he took leave, but with an air that did not argue much anxiety on the subject, whether he might not hope for the pleasure, before he departed, of paying his compliments to the young lady whom he understood he was soon to have the honour of calling his relation ?—We expressed some concern at our inadvertency in having suffered her to leave the room previously to the performance of this ceremonial :

—said we should be happy to have an early opportunity of introducing her to him;—curt’sied;—wished him good morning—and saw him go away with admirable resignation. Sir Reginald outstaid him only long enough to entreat, that, as we now robbed Lady Horatia and himself of almost the whole of his nephew’s time, we would indemnify them for the loss, by permitting that with a few of their remaining guests they should join the evening circle at Hazleford as often as circumstances might render practicable.—By this request, he seemed to be tacitly admitting that, just at present, we could have no wish to frequent East Vale.

“Indeed,” said Lady Horatia, “such a compensation, I think, is justly due to us, since I find that my daughter also is about to become a seceder from us,—and either self-invited, as we shall be, or induced, Lady Stavordale, by your friendly solicitations—means to spend the day with you to-morrow, and to be with you, almost upon the footing of an inmate, during the remainder of the week.”

“But why *almost*, dear madam,” cried I,

“ why not completely upon that footing?— Is it not our interest to secure as many objects of attraction as we can, to confirm you and Sir Reginald in your purpose of being frequent visitors here yourselves ?”

“ Well, well,” resumed her ladyship, “ I leave you and Helen, my kind friends, to settle this matter as may best suit each party. If she becomes stationary here for a few days, she will no otherwise be an incumbrance to the newly-declared lovers, than as she will require Horace, in default of Lord Glenmorne, to become her escort every morning when she rides.”

“ But did I not hear,” cried Sir Reginald, “ that Blanch also, whilst at East Vale, was a very expert horsewoman ?”

“ And she has every disposition in the world,” replied my father, “ to be equally expert at Hazleford!—The difficulty has hitherto been to meet with a horse sufficiently tractable to trust with so unskilful a rider. I have one in view, however, which I think will answer her purpose exactly; and I mean, if possible, to surprise her with the acquisition whilst Miss Tracy is here.”

This point being adjusted, a servant was dispatched into the grounds in search of the fair Helen, who speedily made her appearance, and with Sir Reginald and her mother, returned to East Vale.

My father afterwards communicated to us the purport of his private conference with the liberal baronet. It related, as we had already conjectured, to his intentions in favour of his nephew, on his approaching marriage; and, in avowing these, he laid open, without reserve, the full extent of his ability to befriend the young couple, and the source whence that ability sprung. It appears, that owing to the early death of his father, Sir Reginald had a very long minority, during which, his affairs being administered by a most able guardian, his personal property (exclusive of the hereditary estate), became considerable, and is now, from various causes, still further enlarged. This independent part of his fortune, he has pledged himself to secure immediately to his favourite Horace: and the settlements to be made upon Blanch are to be proportioned, not to the slender pittance which her grandfather

is able to give her, but to the affluent circumstances of her intended husband.

To my mother and me these munificent designs were, of course, truly gratifying. Philippa heard them with somewhat less complacency. She drily remarked, that the philosophical serenity with which Blanch had borne the details respecting Birchinghurst, was now abundantly accounted for: "She probably," added my candid sister, "was well aware, that in its present state, such a residence was not likely, from necessity at least, to be made her principal abiding place."

"She could be aware of no such thing, my dear," quietly replied my father. "Sir Reginald told me, that not even to his nephew had he yet disclosed his intentions. Blanch, therefore, could assuredly know nothing of the matter."

"And consequently," subjoined my mother, "you have all the labour still before you, Philippa, of accounting for her *philosophical serenity*:—and much good may the agreeable employment do you!"

I sincerely regret that our entire ignorance

where to direct to my brother, deprives *us* of the pleasure of announcing, and *him* of the satisfaction of learning, the happy prospects of his daughter. He has never written to us since the arrival of Blanch in England; though, whilst we still believed him to be at Florence, both my father and mother, Philippa and I, separately addressed him. Luckily, there can be no doubt of his consent to so unexceptionable a match: but it is mortifying not to have the power of signifying that consent properly to Mr. Tremayne and his family.

Miss Tracy has been with us two days, and appears well pleased with her visit, and as happy as an engaged lady *can* be, or *ought* to be, in the absence of her lover. Jane Tourberville also, though not as a sleeping guest, is here during much of her time. She is fully sensible of the change which her aunt's sentiments towards her have undergone since the discovery of her attachment

to Mr. Lloyd, and obviously dreads every hour that she is forced to spend at Bovil Court. East Vale would be very little better to her ; for there, she has now, in addition to the grandfather, of whom she always stood in so much awe, a father whose very name appears to shoot cold to her heart like an ice-bolt. Mr. Tourberville, besides being personally almost a stranger to her, is a being of whom she had constantly heard Lady Earlsford speak with such acrimony ; she has, moreover, been treated by him herself with such cutting indifference :—she is aware that Mr. Tremayne, Lady Horatia, nay, even Sir Reginald, sees so little in him to approve, that she thinks of him with the dislike, and considers him with the sort of childish apprehension, which probably, when in the nursery, occupied her mind after reading histories of Ogres and cannibal Giants. Hazleford, therefore, appears to be, at present, her only place of refuge. She might, indeed, apply for permission to go back to the friends from whom Lady Earlsford withdrew her when she brought her to Bovil

Court; but that would be interposing so great a distance between herself and Mr. Lloyd (who, summoned by a letter from Mr. Tremayne, is now hourly expected to return) that she has not the courage to resolve upon such a measure. Meanwhile, under our roof, she is happy at least twelve hours out of every twenty-four; and we find her so perfectly inoffensive, that, though no addition to our society, she is far from being a trouble or restraint to *any* body; and to Martha, she is a very valuable acquisition: they are inseparable, and as idle as they are social,—as little concerned about the weal or woe of others, as about their own improvement.

We were surprised this morning by another visit from Mr. Tourberville. He met Miss Tracy, Blanch, and Mr. Tremayne, when they were out riding, joined them during their excursion, and when they re-

turned to Hazleford, accompanied them into the house.

“It struck me, after he had been sitting with us a little while, that Miss Tracy’s manners towards him were infinitely more attentive and conciliating, than from her acknowledged dislike of him, I had ever expected to observe. She appeared anxious likewise, I thought, that we should all—but Blanch more especially—treat him with courtesy. Something being said about our little evening parties here, and the reduction of the circle at East Vale which they occasioned, Helen asked him why *he* had never made trial of their attractions?—Lady Stavor-dale,” she added, looking at my mother, as if to entice her to confirm the assertion, “would be very happy to see you, and I think that after having once experienced the pleasures of a Hazleford *soirée*, you would not easily be induced to prefer the rattle of a dice-box at East Vale.”

My mother took the hint, and with as much appearance of sincerity as she could assume, said all that was civil, and, on such

occasions, customary. Mr. Tourberville only replied to her by a slight inclination of the head; and then, turning to Miss Tracy with a laugh, he cried: "So you are of opinion that there is a little too much gaming going on at the stately old mansion yonder?"

Helen smiled: "Why I should be apt to imagine," answered she, "that there has been at least quite enough of that species of amusement carried on there, to incline a man so little famed for constancy of taste as you are, to have recourse now to some other kind of recreation."

"Well — as you say, it may be worth while, for a time, to try a little change.—To do that at East Vale, you will allow, is no easy matter. Here there is certainly more promise of agreeable variety."

"No doubt:—we are a thousand times better qualified to charm away *ennui*, than such a little common-place flirt as Mrs. St. Clair. Here is a young lady," indicating Philippa, "who sings and plays delightfully;—ask Lord John Alcester what he thinks on the subject;—Here is another,"

pointing out Blanch, "no way inferior to her, who, when *she* sings, can

‘take the prison’d soul
‘And lap it in Elysium!’

Then, we can all talk admirably—not admirably fast, but admirably well; and if you come amongst us, you will, at the same time, very much gratify others, and, I can answer for it, very much please yourself."

Thus encouraged, he said that he would avail himself of my mother's permission, and wait upon us again in the evening. Helen walked with him to the hall-door when he went away; held a parley of some duration with him before he mounted his horse; and then returned into the sitting-room, to hear us, with one accord, express the most unqualified surprise at the pains which she had taken to enlist so worthless a recruit into our service. She was amused by our exclamations, but refused to assign her reasons for what she had done; only assuring us, in general terms, that they were sufficiently weighty to have obtained the perfect sanction of her mother: "Who, whatever you may

think of me, my dear friends, is never guided by caprice or whim in any thing that she says or does."

"It seems a little extraordinary, however," said Philippa, "that after having deemed it expedient so scrupulously to avoid going to East Vale on this gentleman's account, we should now voluntarily seek to attract him to Hazleford."

"Here I must, though without a brief," cried Mr. Tremayne, "take upon myself the part of Helen's advocate. What her exact inducement, or my aunt's, may be, for wishing Tourberville to be received under this roof, I am unable to divine: but certainly the objections to associating with him here, cannot be so strong as at my uncle's. There, imagining his own privileges to be almost as great as those of the real master of the house, he gives free scope to his prevailing inclinations: calls for wine in a tone of authority; directs the pursuits of the guests; appoints the stakes that are to be played for; bets extravagantly; urges on the timid; wrangles with the suc-

cessful; keeps the family up half the night, and makes a complete revolution in all the former habits both of master and domestics. He cannot be guilty of these indecòrums here, or in any other gentleman's house where his commands can be of no force. He does not come to Hazleford even as a dinner guèst, and therefore can have no opportunity of indulging intemperance; he cannot arrange the amusements of the evening, or propose the sums that are to be hazarded upon the cast of a die. If he finds the more rational resources of Hazleford dull, he will probably never come again;—if he can tolerate them with a good grace, and repeats his visit, his dissipated propensities, much to the advantage of his health, will for a time be suspended; and my uncle will have fresh cause to bless the auspicious spirit that presides over this house.”

Miss Tracy, looking triumphantly round her, now exclaimed:

“There,—I hope this view of the case satisfies you all, and will fully justify me to every body!—What say you, Blanch?—

Will it influence you to a little exertion of your powers this evening, for the entertainment of my new *protégé*?"

"Oh, yes," answered she readily, "if I can contribute to dispose a son of Sir Reginald Tourberville to prefer, even for a few hours, a harmless amusement to a pernicious one, I shall be sincerely rejoiced."

Tremayne, regarding her with delighted approbation, cried: "I was sure that you would thus feel and speak!"

"And I was sure," cried my mother, turning towards him, "that from the moment you undertook to be Miss Tracy's advocate, you would say something to the purpose; something that would give my wavering opinion a determinate direction. You have effected this completely; and, in the hope that his visitations may be of benefit to himself, I am now content to be haunted by Mr. Tourberville's spectral figure as often as he chooses."

"It is wonderful," cried Helen. "that with looks which proclaim so much internal disorder, his spirits and strength should still enable him to support a life so irregular."

Whether unconscious of his own peril, or too proud to yield to infirmity and complaint, he shrinks from the remotest allusion to his health; speaks of his cough, when wholly unable to stifle it, as an accidental occurrence; disguises his want of appetite under the affectation of disliking English cookery; and talks of his future plans with even more confidence than many men who are in the prime of youth, and have always been strangers to the slightest indisposition."

"His malady," resumed my mother, "is of the nature that tends to encourage self-deception. The spirits of persons who are hectic seldom droop in proportion to the decay of their frames. The very fever by which they are consumed, excites them to unnatural animation: yet the energy produced by such fatal means, like the artificial sprightliness of inebriation, must be followed by intervals of bodily languor and mental depression truly terrible. Could we see Mr. Tourberville in the solitude of his own chamber, when his pulse is low, his nerves are relaxed, and every stimulus to exertion is withdrawn, I doubt not that we should often

behold one of the most irritable and wretched of human beings."

When Jane Tourberville, who had been from the room during her father's visit, re-appeared, accompanied by Martha, and was informed that he meant to spend the evening here, she looked undisguisedly frightened, and hastily exclaimed, Oh, dear, then, Lady Stavordale, pray let me go to Mrs. Crosby's! I should like it so much better than—oh, do, pray let me go!"

"My dear Jane," cried Miss Tracy, with earnestness, yet scarcely restraining a smile, "if you thus yield to every needless panic, there will hardly be a house in the county from which you will not be running away to avoid some imaginary object of terror! At East Vale you tremble at the sight of your grandfather;—at Bovil Court you shrink from your aunt;—and here you have not the courage to face your father! If this goes on, where will you, in the end, find rest for the sole of your foot?"

"Where so well as at Storriton Rectory?" said Mr. Tremayne, taking Jane's hand with an air of kindness. "Helen," added he,

“you are too hard upon her. The apprehensions you enumerate may be but too easily accounted for; and to me they appear so excusable, that if Jane, on maturer consideration, perseveres in wishing to avoid the meeting of this evening, I will myself accompany her to Mrs. Crosby’s.”

Jane, re-assured, gratefully thanked him for this promise; and thus, for the present, the matter rested. After dinner, however, Blanch, by gentle persuasions (urged during a short private conference) prevailed upon the poor girl to remain where she was; and Mr. Tremayne, when he joined us in the drawing-room, was evidently much pleased that such had been the result of her deliberation.

Our evening party was particularly brilliant. Mrs. Talbot and her nephew were amongst our guests. Mr. Westcroft, always a welcome addition, likewise came; and two or three other neighbours, male and female—good sort of people, but “without mark or likelihood, and therefore never formally described. From East Vale we had the honour of receiving Lady Horatia, Mr.

Tourberville, Lord John Alcester, and Mr. Elsmere. The venerable Baronet thought it incumbent upon him, in the absence of Lady Horatia, to remain with his other guests.

Every means were tried which the joint ingenuity of Helen and her mother could devise, to enable Blanch to win her way to the good graces of Mr. Tourberville. They chose, in reference to his taste, the songs which she was to sing, and these were principally from popular French operas. At every pause in her performance, they sought to engage her in conversation with him;—in short, they had the patience, for above an hour, to take the most extraordinary pains to *draw her out*, obviously with the desire that she should make a favourable impression upon the very man who, we all knew, they themselves regarded with the severest but most just reprehension!—It was passing strange!—But Blanch, though as ignorant as ourselves of their motives, was so persuaded that they *must* be friendly and wise, that she lent herself to their efforts with a cheerfulness and good sense which, I must con-

fess, our friend Tremayne was not long able to emulate. He became, before the hour was ended, exceedingly annoyed by the novel circumstance of being himself precluded from all possibility of holding any intercourse with her; and his impatience manifested itself so evidently, that Miss Tracy thought it advisable to step up to him, and in a low voice to supplicate that he would put more restraint upon himself, and submit with a better grace to the sacrifice required from him.

“But why,” demanded he, with some irritation, “why is all this anxiety for Tourberville’s entertainment to be so officiously, so systematically displayed, during such an unnecessary length of time? And why is the whole labour of charming him to be thrown upon Blanch? Neither Lord John, nor Philippa have been allowed half the opportunity of shining which they both desire; and their performance would not only satisfy *him* quite as well, but would liberate Blanch—be a pleasure to themselves—and an indescribable relief to me!”

“My dear Horace,” resumed Helen, anxiously, “place a little confidence in my mo-

ther! When did you ever know her guilty of *officiousness*? Are you not sorry to have applied (in an unfavourable sense) such a word to one whom I know you so sincerely love and respect?"

Ashamed to continue his murmurs, and yet but half satisfied, Tremayne turned away exclaiming, "*Well, I am school'd ;—good manners be my speed !*" And walking up to a card-table, at which my father and some others were engaged, he sat down near them, and endeavoured to attend to the game.

Meanwhile, I attentively watched the deportment of Mr. Tourberville towards Blanch, and sought to trace the progress which she was making in her efforts to please him. This, I must confess, was far from being very ostensible ;—he seemed rather to suffer himself to be courted, like a supine Asiatic in his harem, than disposed to meet the attentions which were shown him, with the good-breeding of a man of the world, or the gratitude of a man of real feeling. Her youth, her beauty, her engaging manners, it was evident, touched him not, or touched him too feebly to impart any energy to his

manner of addressing her. When called upon, however, by Lady Horatia or her daughter to express his opinion of their young favourite's voice and skill, he spoke with civility ; and Blanch, who is not covetous of flattery, and rather aimed to prove her readiness to oblige, than felt any ambition to be admired by him, was satisfied with his cool praise, and at length obtained leave to quit the instrument, without an idea of being mortified by the indifference with which she had been heard, though very much inclined to believe, that if Lady Horatia wished to withdraw him from the allurements of the gaming table, it must be by some counter-charm more potent than music.

“ At least, such music as mine,” added she, “ which certainly afforded him no greater pleasure than I should derive from hearing poor old Timothy play upon his varnished fiddle.”

Then proceeding to the place where Mr. Tremayne was seated, and resting her arm upon the back of his chair, she asked him what the attraction was that fixed him so

permanently to that spot? He looked round, and starting up, smiled and answered, "The spell is dissolved; the sound of your voice, once more addressed to *me*—once more restored to its faculty of *speaking*, has set my spirit free; and nothing now remains at this table to engage my attention a moment."

"Were you then driven hither, poor soul, to escape the misery of hearing my tuneful efforts?"

"They made you prosecute those efforts too long, my Blanch. I thought I never should have again recovered my companion. You are too valuable an intellectual associate to be contentedly given up for so large a portion of an evening to the uninteresting occupation of warbling little pert French songs: it was throwing away your powers in every respect. The music was as utterly unworthy of you as the tasteless auditor for whom that music was selected."

"But when I sung really *good* music," said Blanch, a little archly, "and sung to an auditor who was *not* tasteless, to Lord John Alcester, you were equally dissatisfied. I

believe the only way to please you will be, never to sing at all."

"Oh, certainly! You know how detestable I thought your tone of voice—your style—your expression—your manner of accompanying yourself—the very first instant that I heard you? Do you not remember the night that my uncle and I surprised you at Bovil Court seated before the instrument, and singing to my mother and her little auditory? I am persuaded that the disgust with which I listened to you, must have made a deep and lasting impression upon your mind! And afterwards, whilst shut up here at Hazleford, rueing the effects of my adventurous folly upon the bridge, I again one evening caught the sound of your voice from my bed-room window; and venturing out upon the balcony to try how I could a second time endure such croaking accents, was laid up with a fresh attack of fever, and obliged to do penance for three whole days before I could recover from the shock which you had given to my nerves!"

"Oh, I remember it all!" cried Blanch,

laughing. "But what is still more provoking than your aversion to my poor little musical genius, is the trick you have, whenever any accusation is brought against you, of making yourself out worse than you really are, instead of taking the trouble to enter upon your defence."

"Have you discovered this little peculiarity of mine?" cried he, much amused. "I am afraid the detection will incline you, in future, to treat me with such intolerable severity, that there will be nothing left for me to say of myself, half so bad as what you will already have uttered."

"On the very first occasion that offers, I will do my best to justify such reasonable apprehensions. But, meanwhile, come and look at the beautiful set of engravings which Lady Horatia brought me this evening from your uncle. I have yet had time to cast only a very slight glance over them, but I believe that the subjects are all taken from Shakespeare."

Mr. Tremayne very readily followed her to the table on which the prints had been deposited. I was likewise invited to inspect

them ; and whilst we were all three engaged in discussing their respective merits, Mr. Tourberville, detaching himself from the listeners around Philippa and Lord John, approached our little party, and stationed himself at the back of Blanch's chair. His occasional remarks upon the engravings proved him to be a far more competent judge of what is good in panting than in music. I gathered from them, that he not only is an intelligent connoisseur, but likewise something of a practical artist ; and, glad to have discovered any subject on which he was likely to converse with interest, I hesitated no longer to address him whenever I found opportunity ; and succeeded, by degrees, in rendering him, comparatively, at least, sociable. Yet for one who, in the lenient phraseology of the world, has been a *gay man*, Mr. Tourberville's manners are at times singularly uncouth. He evinces none of that insinuating polish, that pleasing but treacherous softness of deportment, which so often distinguishes a fashionable libertine. Even the attractive loveliness of a young creature like Blanch, urged on by the wishes

of her friends to appear anxious for his notice, failed to awaken in him one spark of gallantry. Yet he can flirt, it is said, with the coquettish Mrs. St. Clair; he can talk with rapture of the fascinations of a French opera dancer; and he has been a dupe all his life to female artifice. But innocence, cultivation, modest grace, and undesigning simplicity, have no charms for him. His principles and taste are equally vitiated; and in the society of women of real refinement, however young, however beautiful, he is so little disposed to be dangerously courteous, that *I* had, it soon became apparent, quite as good a chance of arresting his attention as the most blooming and engaging female in the room. We talked of our favourite art with fluency and mutual pleasure for a considerable time. Mr. Tremayne and Blanch, at intervals, joined in the conversation; either concurring in sentiment with, or gently differing from us; and Lady Horatia, gratified by witnessing our good intelligence, suffered no one to interfere with us; but now and then giving me an expressive look of satis-

tisfaction, held aloof herself as scrupulously as she contrived that all others should.

Amongst the engravings that first gave rise to our critical discussion, was one that particularly pleased Blanch, and drew forth our comments longer than any in the collection. It represented that interesting scene in the play of *Cymbeline*, in which Imogen is first discovered in the cave of Belarius by the two young princes, Guiderius and Arviragus. The countenances and attitudes of these brothers ; the picturesque scenery surrounding them, and especially the soft and timid beauty of Imogen, contrasting so well with the spirited expression of her unknown kinsmen, extracted from us all, Mr. Tourberville excepted, the warmest commendations. Surprised, and somewhat chagrined, by his obstinate silence, Blanch turned to him, and said, "Is there nothing in this composition that can entice you to bestow upon it one poor little atom of praise?"

"It is so every way inferior," answered he, "to a picture at East Vale, exhibiting the same personages, nearly at the same point of

time, that I cannot view it with the smallest pleasure."

"At East Vale?" repeated Mr. Tremayne, much astonished. "In what part of the house, then, is it concealed?"

"It once," replied his cousin, "held a conspicuous station in the picture-gallery, as a companion to the King John and Hubert; but that was before you can remember any thing of the matter. My father took a dislike to it, for reasons which I need not at present explain, and ordered it to be removed. For many years it was consigned to obscurity in some remote part of the building, and the vacancy in the gallery was filled up with the work of some other artist. Since my return, I have made a point of restoring it again to light, and it now hangs up in one of the best rooms attached to my division of the house. My father has seen it there on one or two occasions, and is becoming gradually sufficiently reconciled to its re-appearance, to stand and contemplate it without discomposure."

"You must to-morrow let me look at this long-hidden treasure."

“And welcome,—and if these ladies have any curiosity to view it also, I beg that they will put themselves under your guidance, and visit it at the same time.”

“Explain to me, more intelligibly, in which room I shall find it.”

“In what, I believe, has been usually called the east dressing-room. You may enter it from the gallery, without having any communication with the rest of my apartment.”

A good deal more passed on the subject of this picture, which so effectually raised our curiosity, that Blanch and I, having already promised to accompany Miss Tracy to East Vale in the morning, to look at some beautiful specimens of a service of China sent from London for her inspection, agreed to make use of the opportunity for paying a visit to the east dressing-room. Mr. Tourberville heard this determination with a smile, which I suppose was meant to indicate that it gave him pleasure; but smiles do not become him as they do his father; they only make him look more strikingly ghastly; and, I could almost fancy, give to his countenance an expression the reverse of angelic! but

such as they are, he has more than one description of smiles; and, at a later hour, whilst he was seated, during supper, next to Mr. Maurice Villiers, I saw such specimens of his real style of gaiety, as amply satisfied me. Villiers, though much the most prepossessing man of the two, both with respect to manners and personal appearance, has yet, I perceive, a perfectly congenial spirit. They are each, though not in an equal degree, prone to coarse and artless ribaldry. Their mirth, proceeding from jests, communicated to each other in an under voice, was rude and almost distressing; for it was impossible not to perceive, that it was often indulged at the expense of some of the company. The looks they directed towards several of the individuals présent, were impertinent in the extreme. Neither our family nor his own escaped the derision of Mr. Tourberville; and what disgusted me more than all, were certain buffooneries which I unavoidably overheard, relating to the approaching nuptials of his daughter with the *young prig of a parson*. In allusion to the wooing which

he chose to conclude was perpetually going forward between Blanch and Mr. Tremayne, and not long since, had been in equal activity between Miss Tracy and her *Orson*, he thought it witty to denominate Hazleford, a perfect dovecot. He wondered whether any thing serious would result from the mutual passion for quavering and trilling of Philippa and Lord John; asked Villiers how old he thought her? Said she was a devilish fine girl, but as affected as an ape! Ridiculed the vulgar expression of Martha's countenance, in terms too vulgar to bear repetition. Swore my mother was a shrew by her looks; and that I was the only individual of the family that had common sense. And then, stretching and yawning, said to his worthy compeer,

"This is confounded dull work! I shall not be easily trepanned hither again. You must come to-morrow evening to East Vale; I will shew you some sport there, my boy, worth all the dweedledeeing and dweedledumming of five hundred of these insipid damsels! Nothing I hate so much as formal parties, made up of wise-acre dowagers,"

glancing at Lady Horatia; "prosy grey-beards," looking at my father; "and puling, love-sick misses!"

These things to hear—low bred and senseless as they were—did Villiers most *facetiously incline*.—I could have beaten him for the idiot grin with which he sat and listened to fooleries so offensive; and when I afterwards caught two or three sentences which apprised me, that in his turn he was contributing to the amusement of his neighbour by sarcastic reflections upon Lady Earlsford, and presumptuously insinuating that she was in love with him, I was so much exasperated that it was with difficulty I kept my seat!

At length my penance ended;—the carriages arrived that were to convey our guests to their respective homes; and relying joyfully upon Mr. Tourberville's declaration that nothing should ever *trepan* him again to Hazleford, I saw him depart with a sense of relief, which could not have been greater had a bailiff quitted the house, followed by all his myrmidons.

Our visit to East Valè this morning, has been productive of a discovery that has affected the spirits—and may, possibly, affect the prospects of poor Blanch, in a very grievous manner.

As I was engaged to be of the party, Miss Tracy gave up the plan of going on horseback, and she, Blanch, Mr. Tremayne, and myself, set off soon after breakfast in my father's coach. We talked to her, as we went, of the picture which we were to see, and excited in her a desire to view it also. "If it is," cried she, "as excellent as Mr. Tourberville asserts, I hope that it will soon regain its old station in the gallery. I should like to know what could induce Sir Reginald to condemn it to banishment."

"We understood," said I, "that though the subject is fictitious, the figures introduced are all portraits:—of *whom*, however, Mr. Tourberville did not inform us; but I suspect, that his elder brother may be one of the number."

"Very likely; and that idea makes me

still more anxious to see it. There is no resemblance of him suffered to be visible either at East Vale, or at Sir Reginald's house in town; and I have often regretted it; for my mother says, that he was uncommonly handsome:—a little like *you*, Horace," added she, laughing, "only fifty times better looking."

"Pooh, pooh! Allowance should be made for the favourable circumstance of his having died young.—Those who have the policy to adopt that measure, always ensure to themselves the reputation of having been the handsomest—the wisest—the wittiest of their race! Were I very ambitious of such sort of fame, I need only make a sudden exit from the world, and you would never know how to ascribe to me sufficient beauty either of person or mind."

"How impossible it is, I find, to put you out of conceit with yourself!—Blanch, how *can* you endure him?"

"Oh, exceedingly well, as long as you are at hand to admonish and correct him!"

When we arrived at East Vale, Lady Hosiata, who had seen the carriage from the windows, met us in the hall, and conducted

us immediately to her own dressing-room. Sir Reginald, she told us, was shut up writing; but as he knew that we were coming, he would expect to see us before we departed, though there was no occasion to interrupt him sooner. Meanwhile, the elegant display of China which we had been invited to examine, was exhibited to our view, and for some time engaged our attention very effectually. Blanch and Mr. Tremayne were the first who began to weary of the painted shew, and gradually retreated to some distance, to talk to each other of more interesting matters. Miss Tracy, soon observing their defection, said, with a laugh, " Pretty counsellors those are to assist in deciding between the merits of a Colebrook Dale or a Worcester dinner service!—I hope they will bestow a little more consideration upon the choice of their own plates and dishes. But, my dear Miss Stavordale, go with them, for I dare say that *you* also are longing to be released—and look at the picture which you want to see. I will follow you as soon as I have heard all my mother's admirable reasons for preferring a white ground to a co-

loured one—a plain surface to an embossed one. These are matters, you know, which must not be lightly resolved upon!”

I accepted the permission, and under the conduct of Mr. Tremayne, who alone knew the way, Blanch and I proceeded towards the east room. In the gallery leading to it, I saw Signor Antonio, lurking about, I thought, with all the appearance of a person intent upon some mischief. Not apprehending, however, that his proceedings concerned *us* in any way, we passed him with quiet indifference; and soon found ourselves before the object which it was our purpose to inspect. Scarcely had we reached it, when Mr. Tourberville, hearing, as he told us, our steps and voices, opened the door of an inner room, and joined us. The usual salutations having passed, we again turned to the picture, and he began explaining it.

“The subject,” said he, “almost tells itself. That pale figure, borne in the arms of the sorrowing youth just issuing from the cave, you must be aware is Imogen, supposed by Arviragus to be dead. The second youth, and the man of maturer age, who both stand

looking on with faces of amazed concern, are Guiderius and Belarius.—Now observe attentively the countenances of these two last:—did you never see any individuals whom they resemble?”

“In him who is meant to represent Belarius,” said Blanch, “I see a strong likeness of Sir Reginald Tourberville. The young man by his side, I cannot so easily find out; and yet, there certainly is a sort of family resemblance between the two faces.”

“Eighteen years ago,” resumed Mr. Tourberville, “I sat for the original of that young man, and the portrait was then thought a good one:—I acknowledge that I bear to it now but little resemblance. The other youth, he who supports that beautiful, though apparently, lifeless creature, was intended for my brother; and thus far, you see, this is a complete family group.”

We turned our eyes towards the figure which he had last pointed out, and though we forbore to say so, found it in every respect,—features, form, and expression,—so infinitely superior to the one which he had owned as a representation of himself, that it would

have been long ere we could have withdrawn our attention from it, but for the irresistible charm that attracted, and soon, almost exclusively, enchained our thoughts as well as our looks to the exquisite figure of Imogen. Never was beauty more graceful, more touching, than that which was displayed in her languid, bending form. Though her eyes were closed, their long dark lashes were so fine, that it was impossible to regret the concealment of the orbs they fringed. Her features were strictly Grecian; but in their combination, more sensibility was observable than I have almost ever seen united with so much regularity;—they excited love as well as admiration, and were so characterized by innocence and sweetness, that the mournful expression with which they were stamped, melted the beholder with the tenderest pity. Nothing resembling the livid hue of death deformed her complexion;—the paleness that overspread it had all the delicacy and clearness of the purest lily :

“ *Ella pareo, quasi fior mezzo inciso,
Piegando il lento collo.*”

Tasso.

And the glossy ebon tresses that depended in profusion from her drooping head, contrasting with the whiteness of her cheek and throat, gave to the countenance, in defiance of its colourless uniformity, a species of animation, which, though less brilliant, was scarcely less attractive than the most glowing bloom.

“And is that,” said I, for Blanch was too much wrapt to speak, “is that a mere fancy picture?—and yet, I scarcely need ask;—such perfect beauty cannot have had an original, here in England, at least;—the features bear no affinity to those of an English face;—they seem rather copied from some classical model of antiquity.”

“Be not too confident of that,” said Mr. Tourberville. “They were, I can assure you, the exact resemblance of a living individual, who, if possible, was yet handsomer than she is here delineated.—Though a foreigner she was so well versed in our English literature, that it was owing to her admirable exposition of the subject, that the painter—likewise a foreigner—caught enough of the spirit of the poet, to give this

excellent representation of the romantic scene."

"Both *foreigners*!" hastily exclaimed Blanch, suddenly detaching her eyes from the canvass, and turning round with the abruptness of a person forcibly aroused from a fit of deep abstraction—"Of what country, Mr. Tourberville?"

"Of Italy," answered he.

"And—how were these two persons connected?—What were their names?"

"They were a father and a daughter:—their names were Castelli."

Blanch clasped her hands, and half bent her knee, as if impelled to an act of prostration before the lovely portrait, whilst raising to it again her streaming eyes, she said in a tone of extreme emotion:

"Then—I am now gazing at the image of my mother!—Oh, my heart told me so the first instant that I beheld it!—But, when *I* knew her, beautiful as she still was—how sadly, alas! was she changed from this representation of all that is young, and healthy, and new to care and sorrow!"

“Your mother, my dear madam! Impossible!” exclaimed Mr. Tourberville.

Blanch regarded him with amazement :—
“Why should you think so?” cried she,
“Why should the assertion surprise you?—
Did you not know that I was the daughter
of an Italian?”

“But, of Aurelia Castelli, I neither knew
—nor, to say the truth—can *wish* you to be
the daughter!”

Whilst, speechless and aghast, Blanch
fixed her distended eyes upon his face, inca-
pable of comprehending the purport of such
a speech, Mr. Tremayne indignantly ex-
claimed : “Charles—what can be your pro-
vocation to throw out insinuations which,
you are aware, *must* be so painful to the feel-
ings of your auditress?”

“I have done,” coldly replied Mr. Tour-
berville : and turning away, he seemed on
the point of retiring to his own room : but
Blanch caught his arm, and impressively
said :—

“No, Mr. Tourberville, you must *not*
have done ! You must deign to account for
the expression which has fallen from you.—

Why should you be reluctant to know me for the daughter of Aurelia Castelli?"

"Excuse me, young lady;—I beg to decline answering that question. I am sorry that I ever induced you to enter this room. Leave it now, however;—and think no more either of what you have heard, or what you have seen in it."

"You know that to be impossible," resumed Blanch, still eagerly detaining him. "You know that what you have said is sufficient to excite in me an anxiety to understand you too vehement to be repressed!—Never daughter loved—venerated—exulted in a mother as I did—as I *still do*—in mine.—I *must* know what could be the meaning of the ambiguous phrase which you just now uttered!"

Whilst Mr. Tourberville, either feeling or affecting great disinclination to answer her, seemed meditating how to avoid complying with her importunity, approaching footsteps were heard, the door opened; and Sir Reginald appeared. He glanced his eye a moment towards the picture before which we were still standing—withdrew them with a

half-suppressed sigh,—and then addressing Blanch, said: “My young friend, what brought you here? And how is it that you could be so long in the house, without bestowing one thought upon your faithful admirer?”

“Do not accuse me of such ungrateful remissness, Sir Reginald. I *did* think of you, and asked permission to seek you the moment we arrived: but Lady Horatia told us that you were busy writing. I should not, however, have gone away—even at the risk of unseasonably interrupting you—without endeavouring to obtain a sight of you.”

“Good girl. But tell me—what was your inducement for visiting this room?”

“We were attracted hither by the praises which we had heard lavished upon this picture. And now, Sir Reginald, as we *are* here, and as you have fortunately joined us, will you permit me to address to you a few enquiries respecting the work before us, which Mr. Tourberville refuses to answer?”

“Ask whatever you please. It is a subject which I should long have shrunk from with the most sensitive irritability:—but I

believe that I can now bear it with firmness ; —and from *you*, I am well assured that I can better bear any thing, than from all the world beside !”

“ Thank you, dearest Sir,” cried Blanch ; and then, passing her hand through his arm, and pointing to the picture—“ Are you aware,” she added, “ that Annibal Castelli, the artist who produced that beautiful composition, was my grandfather ? That his daughter was my mother ?”

The Baronet, starting at these words, and letting fall the arm by which she held, as if involuntarily shrinking from her touch, turned extremely pale, and staggering back to a chair that stood behind him, sunk into it, fixed his eyes upon the ground, and maintained a gloomy, ominous silence.

How shall I describe the consternation that seized Blanch, or the astonishment that was felt by Mr. Tremayne and myself, on witnessing this sudden and extraordinary change ? We turned with appealing eyes to Mr. Tourberville for some explanation of what we saw : but his hard unsympathizing nature refused all correspondence with our

feelings ;—he looked on, during a few seconds, with an air bordering upon mockery, at the passing scene,—and then calmly withdrew into the inner apartment. How like the retreat of a spider into his nook, after duly preparing the web destined to entangle his prey !

In the mean time, Sir Reginald, making an effort to recover from the shock which he had so evidently sustained, slowly arose, and placing his hand upon Blanch's shoulder, though without venturing to look at her, he said in a low yet emphatic voice :—" I grieve for the blow that awaits you, my poor child ! *You*, I well know, are innocent ;—but she whom you have named as your mother. . . . Oh, Blanch,—I would that you had never torn the veil of ignorance from my eyes !"

Blanch, who, on the subject of her mother, may justly be said to be ' tremblingly alive,' now, finding it impossible longer to restrain her agitation, clung to the Baronet's arm as he seemed about to leave her, and impetuously exclaimed : " Oh, tear away that killing veil from *my* eyes also ! What is it that you mean, Sir Reginald ? What can

prejudice or calumny ever have breathed against my faultless mother? Let me know the worst! I will disprove every charge;—I will compel you to retract every aspersion;—I will stake my life upon her unsullied worth and goodness! Oh, call not *me* innocent, whilst you defame *her*! I disclaim all praise in which she is not to participate;—I am but what she formed me;—I have no merit—I *can* have none which I derived not from the example of her life, and the purity of her precepts!”

Sir Reginald was too generous to resent the vehemence of this language: but it appeared to render him more than ever averse from speaking to her with the plainness which she required.

“I cannot,” he cried, turning to me, “I cannot afflict a heart like hers, by giving her in person, the full details for which she is so importunate. That the individual whom she so proudly acknowledges as her mother, conscientiously fulfilled all the duties of that character, I rejoice, on this sweet girl’s account, to believe; that she also acquitted herself to admiration of every filial obliga-

tion, I had opportunities of personally witnessing. But—to me, and to one—the dearest, the most noble-minded of my race—she has been a scourge too fatal ever to be forgiven! By her was kindled and thrown amongst us, a torch of discord which consumed every tie that bound us to each other. She found us happy—reciprocally attached—lookéd up to by the world with envy—and gratefully conscious of the blessings of our lot. She rendered us . . . oh, Blanch! how will you bear to know the ruin which she brought upon us! How will you bear to hear of a father stung to madness by the treachery of his son—the son he had devotedly loved—the son from whom he had formed the most exalted expectations;—that son, an alien from integrity—a fugitive from his native land—a self-degraded outcast—and finally,” he shuddered as he spoke, “a victim, in the cause of his unworthy companion, to the false laws of honour—the sanguinary fury of a duellist!”

The last words of this terrible speech, pronounced in a tremulous and almost inaudible accent, were followed by the abrupt retreat

of the agitated old man, who, striking his hand to his forehead, and uttering a heart-felt groan, rushed impetuously past us, and quitted the room.

Blanch, as if stunned, remained motionless, silent, and apparently without perception of any thing that was passing around her. Her cheeks were completely divested of colour; her eyes had lost all animation; her arms hung listlessly by her side; and her countenance, from the very intensity with which she felt, looked as if she were utterly deprived of all feeling whatever. We spoke to her, Mr. Tremayne and I, with the most anxious solicitude;—she answered us not; she gave no indication even of hearing us. Terrified at the state in which we saw her, we led her, unresisting, and probably unconscious, to the window; threw up the sash, and whilst Tremayne supported and watched over her, I flew to Lady Horatia's apartment for a glass of water. In the gallery I met Miss Tracy, who with an air of perplexity and alarm, was hastening to us:

“What has happened?” exclaimed she;
“Sir Reginald has been to my mother's door

to solicit a private conference with her, and the momentary glimpse I had of his countenance has filled me with dismay! *You* scarcely look more composed. Tell me, I entreat you, what is the matter?"

I referred her to Mr. Tremayne in the east room, and pursued my course towards the apartment which she had just quitted.

On rejoining my poor Blanch, I found her—thanks to the soothing tenderness of the comforter with whom I had left her—dissolved in salutary tears, and no longer exhibiting so fearful an image of suspended reason. Miss Tracy, without knowing exactly what to suspect, yet saw enough to convince her, that whatever might have occurred, was of a nature so peculiarly trying to the feelings of Blanch, that it would be cruel, at such a moment, to ask any questions in her presence. She therefore restrained her curiosity, and satisfied herself with remaining in silent attendance upon the grieving girl, holding one of her hands, and regarding her with looks that denoted the warm and genuine interest which she took in her affairs. We prevailed upon her, as

soon as she was a little tranquillized, to leave the luckless apartment, and return to Lady Horatia's dressing-room. Before she went, pausing once more in front of the picture, and fixing her eyes with melancholy fondness upon the resemblance of her mother, she said in a low and inward voice: "If what I have this day heard is true—true but in the smallest part,—I must, indeed, teach myself a lesson of humility which I had little thought to learn! Whatever might be my own deficiencies—*there* I had always felt confident of possessing a just and honourable cause for triumph! Oh, how shall I wean myself from a belief so long and so exultingly cherished?"

"Cherish it still, dearest Blanch!" cried Mr. Tremayne, warmly. "Let not a series of vague and unsupported charges, rob you of the delight of loving and esteeming a parent to whom you are indebted for so many of your own excellencies. When the half-told history is more explicitly disclosed, trust me, it will be found, that her offences amount to nothing more than having inspired

an ardent and uncontrollable passion in my uncle's eldest son, which, though it might terminate tragically, was, in its origin and progress, guiltless and irreproachable."

Blanch hung her head; she dared not trust to a representation so flattering to her wishes, but so strongly contradicted by all that she had recently heard: it cheered her, however, in despite of herself; and by the time we reached Lady Horatia's dressing-room, Miss Tracy thought herself justifiable in asking for the particulars of what had passed.

We briefly related to her the whole transaction. She heard us without a single comment, though evidently fraught with information which she was continually on the point of revealing, but as often compelled herself to withhold, either from motives of prudence, or from the timely recollection of some promise which she was bound not to infringe. She has since confided to me the real reason of her reserve; and I cannot but allow that she was wise in being so cautious.

It appears, that Mr. Tourberville, from the

moment that he became aware of the engagement subsisting between Blanch and his cousin, began throwing out hints respecting her maternal relations, which exceedingly annoyed the zealous Helen, and still more seriously disturbed her mother. They both spoke to him on the subject; representing, in a light which they thought *must* make him friendly to her, the meritorious sincerity with which Blanch had voluntarily stated to Sir Reginald the real circumstances of her family; and entreating him (Mr. Tourberville) to forbear all unpleasant animadversions upon a topic which it could answer no good purpose to revive, and which it could not but, in the highest degree, offend Horace Tremayne to convert into a matter of public discussion. To this he only answered, that ingenuous as it was pretended that Blanch Stavordale had been, he was firmly convinced that she had never revealed the *name* of her Italian connexions: “My father,” added he, “may be so far infatuated by her wiles, as to overlook—a circumstance sufficiently astonishing!—the acknowledged meanness of her birth: but were he to penetrate beyond that

fact—were he to learn *who*, as well as *what*, the mother of this accomplished Syren was,—the game would be up!—Horace might sigh for his *fair preserver* in vain:—at least, if he adhered to her, his disinterestedness would be put to a sore trial; for, there cannot be a doubt that his uncle would, from that moment, discard him from his favour for ever!”

Lady Horatia, suppressing her disgust at the callous tone of ridicule in which this was uttered, reasoned with him so mildly; took such pains to convince him of the superior merit of Blanch; of the wretchedness that would ensue to *all* parties from a breach of the contract; and of the obligations which he himself was under to the generosity of Horace during the early period of his residence abroad—that, at length, Mr. Tourberville was shamed or persuaded into giving a promise, that he would forbear saying any thing which should lead to a detection of the mystery still hanging over the birth of Blanch.

“To confirm him in this good resolution,” continued Miss Tracy, “we became anxious

that he should see more of her, and urged him to repeat his visit at Hazleford; to study her artless character; to engage her in conversation; to attend impartially to her manners and sentiments;—and then, if he *could*, to extend the prejudice which he entertained against the mother, to her lovely and deserving daughter. This must account for the obvious pains we took to draw her out yesterday evening. How they have answered, I grieve to think!—Upon Tourberville's stony heart, it is plain, that neither her intelligence, her personal graces, her fine countenance, nor her accomplishments, made the faintest impression!—I am as certain as I am of my own existence, that he decoyed her into expressing a wish to see that fatal picture, purposely to make the sincerity which we had so much praised, instrumental to her betraying, *herself*, the secret which she has hitherto so innocently maintained; and which he, no doubt, had so speedily repented having pledged his word not to disclose. How the Baronet was allured into the room at the precise moment when his presence was required, remains to be ascertained: but, that his son

contrived, by some manœuvre, to bring that circumstance about, cannot, I think, be questioned."

Here I interrupted Miss Tracy, to mention, that in our way to the east room, I had observed the servant of Mr. Tourberville loitering about in the gallery, as if placed there to be a spy upon our movements.

"I hate that servile animal!" resumed she. "He looks fitted for any act of fraud and meanness. I have no doubt, that, previously instructed by his master, he carried the information to Sir Reginald (or caused it to be carried) of your being in that apartment. But, dear Miss Stavordale, we must be very cautious how we express our opinion of Tourberville's artifices in the presence of Horace. Their near relationship might be no bar to their becoming active foes, should Horace be taught to understand too plainly the nature of the good offices which his cousin is endeavouring to render him. I know not whether Tourberville is a coward as well as a knave;—I sincerely hope that he is; for I cannot but fear, that this is but the beginning of the mischief which he meditates to effect,

and that he will lose no opportunity of deserv-
ing—though, I trust, he will not accept
—a challenge from his injured kinsman.
His animosity against Blanch undoubtedly
springs from his sordid apprehensions of the
extent to which Sir Reginald means to carry
his munificence, if the marriage peaceably
takes place; and his object is, to throw diffi-
culties in its way, which, eventually, may
lead to its being completely broken off.”

Painful as it was to believe all this, I yet
found it impossible to deny my assent to its
probability.

But, to return to the dressing-room at
East Vale.

Having waited in vain, during a consider-
able interval, for the re-appearance of Lady
Horatia, Blanch, who was extremely unwill-
ing to quit the house without seeing either
her or Sir Reginald, besought Miss Tracy to
venture down to the library door, in order to
obtain for her permission to take leave of them
before she went. Helen, active in the cause
of friendship, undertook the mission without
delay; and, with a mixture of impatience

and apprehension, we remained counting the minutes of her absence.

The message, which, with slackened steps, she brought back, though not unkind, was far from being exhilarating. Sir Reginald, through the medium of Lady Horatia—for Helen had not been able to obtain direct access to him—desired her to tell Blanch, that he was still in too much disturbance to see her; he, however, sent to her his love: “And my mother bade me add,” continued Miss Tracy, “that she hoped to spend the evening at Hazleford. Meanwhile, my dear Horace, your uncle is desirous that you should go to him immediately ”

Horace, who seemed to look upon this as the first symptom of a design to detach him from Blanch, calmly, but firmly declared, that he would obey his uncle’s summons, after attending us home—and *not before*. We besought him to repair to the library instantly: but his purpose was not to be shaken; and finally we all departed together.

Blanch, silent and dejected, but expressing by her looks the grateful sense she had of our attentions, excused herself from entering the

sitting-room when we arrived at **Hazleford**, and took refuge directly in her own chamber. Mr. Tremayne accompanied us no farther than the hall-door, where, detaining the hand which she had held out to him at parting, he said, with a cheering look: "Farewell, my own **Blanch**;—dismiss this sadness from your brow;—take comfort in reflecting, as I do, that whatever may be the injustice or the prejudices of others, they cannot affect our individual happiness; they cannot disunite our hearts, nor cancel our mutual vows.—Once more then, dear love, farewell; and when I come again, let me be blessed by the sight of a returning smile."

She made a faint attempt to comply by anticipation with this request, but a tear started to her eye at the same moment that her lips sought to assume an expression of cheerfulness; and, fearing to expose herself to the observation of the servants, she hastily ran off.

It was with deep regret that, soon after, I applied myself to the task of informing my mother of what had occurred. She entered, with all the commiseration I had expected,

into the feelings of poor Blanch; execrated the subtlety with which Mr. Tourberville had brought the discovery about; was extremely concerned for the vexation which might accrue from it to Mr. Tremayne: but, with her customary elasticity of spirit, found consolation for herself in the reflection, that, after all, the worst that could result from the business would be, the loss of those pecuniary advantages promised to the young couple by Sir Reginald, and now, in all probability, no longer to be expected. "They must do without them," added she coolly: "at their age, and with strong mutual affection, the idea of being—I will not say, *poor*, but, simply—*not rich*, is nothing. They will be rich in health, in spirits, in friends, in talents; and if such wealth will not content them, they deserve to be miserable."

"But the riches," said I, "upon which Blanch set the highest value,—the good name of her mother—seem to be lost without hope of recovery: and I fear, that a disappointment so unlooked for, 'there where she had garnered up her heart,' will make an impression upon her mind, never to be erased."

“ *Never*, is a word, my dear Anne, which, applied to the indelible impressions made upon the mind of a girl of sixteen, is totally without meaning. Be as romantic as you please when talking of her as a mistress or a wife; ascribe to her, upon trust, in either of those characters, all the devoted constancy of the stockdove; such predictions, though rash and common-place, are pleasant to hear, and would be agreeable to see realised. But what can be more preposterous than to extend the attribute of immutability to every other feeling of a creature so young, so airy, and with spirits so buoyant ?”

There is *one* subject upon which I always take care to attend to the significance of the word *Never* : I never contradict my mother's opinions beyond the degree which I think that her temper will patiently endure. To a certain point, she can bear opposition as well—perhaps better, than any person I know: exceed *that* limit, and you enter upon a path so full of nettles and briars, that it becomes difficult to recede from it without a scratch or a sting !

Lady Horatia, I now indeed have ample reason to believe, is most justly entitled to the high praise which Sir Reginald bestowed upon her, when he first announced to me her expected arrival at East Vale. Her behaviour to our humbled and melancholy Blanch last night, could not have been more studiously kind, had she been her own child. She embraced her on her entrance with marked affection; drew her to a place on the sofa beside her; looked at—spoke to her with such distinguishing regard, that all present were struck by a warmth of manner which, in her, is so unusual; and to those who were in the secret of what had passed in the morning, it was a cordial the most reviving. She came accompanied by Mr. Tremayne; and Lord John Alcester, who spends every evening here, was also one of her attendants.

After tea, committing Blanch to the assiduities of her nephew, Lady Horatia arose, and invited me to go with her into another room. I instantly complied; and when we were by ourselves, she thus began:

“ I have selected you, my dear Miss Stavordale, as the properest person in your family to hear and to communicate the particulars of a domestic history which I am commissioned to make known to you ;—a task, which, however painful, I am anxious to acquit myself of with as little delay as possible. You will know what to suppress, and what to reveal. Parts of the tale there can, certainly, be no necessity for wounding the ears of Blanch by repeating in her presence. Some points in her mother’s conduct whilst a resident in this country, were unquestionably, faulty; and, though the knowledge that her after-life was marked by general propriety, may absolve her in *our* eyes from the errors of her youth, nothing, I fear, will ever redeem her from censure in the opinion of the resentful Baronet. But I am trifling with your curiosity. Let us sit down, and I will begin my relation without further preface.—

“ Signor Annibal Castelli, well known to many accomplished English travellers, then in Italy, came to this country about eighteen years since, bringing with him letters of re-

commendation to several of our most distinguished patrons of the arts. Amongst others, Sir Reginald Tourberville received such letters, and their warmth was so unusual, that he became anxious not only to serve, but to cultivate the acquaintance of a man, spoken of in terms of such high panegyric. Castelli was a poet and a scholar, as well as a painter; and possessed such admirable powers of conversation—such quickness of parts, and originality of genius, that he very soon established himself (as it then appeared) firmly in the good graces of the Baronet, at whose table he was almost a daily guest, and from whose liberality he derived, in the exercise of his profession, the most splendid encouragement.

“ Meanwhile, a rumour reached Sir Reginald, that his *protegé* had been accompanied to England by a daughter, equally remarkable for her beauty, her talents, her modesty, and elegance. She was courted and caressed by some of the most fastidious and high-born amongst our female nobility. Her celebrity every day acquired fresh lustre; in short, she was *the fashion*—and that, in London,

is saying every thing. Sir Reginald grew solicitous to see her; and I happened to be present when this boon (a fatal one it proved) was at length accorded him. It was at the house of a woman of high rank that we both for the first time beheld and heard her. There was music in the course of the evening, and the fair Florentine, though not invited as a performer, was supplicated to sing. With the most graceful good-breeding, she consented; the master of the house conducted her to the instrument; one of the professional men present sat down to accompany her; silence was enjoined, and she began. Of her performance, I ought not to speak, for it far transcended my powers of description. It was such, that whilst entranced, I listened; she seemed to direct my feelings at her pleasure; now raising, and now depressing them, according to the expression of dignity or pathos which she chose to give to a voice with which there was nothing that she could not accomplish. Her carriage, her countenance, her figure, added wonderfully to the magic of her powers. She was then in her twentieth year; and with as

much beauty as is possessed by Blanch, had an unaffected elevation of aspect, an air of native grandeur, that rendered her the most noble and commanding-looking creature I have ever beheld. I can convey to you no idea of the effect she produced upon the whole assembly. Throughout her performance, you might, to use a familiar expression, *have heard a pin fall*; so mute, so hushed was every auditor; and the knowledge that she was not a singer by profession, whose exertions money could command, appeared to aid the charm, and certainly increased the respectful attention of all around. Upon Sir Reginald, her influence was decisive. The instant she paused, he made Signor Castelli go up with him to the spot where she stood, and present him to her; and from that moment he never quitted her side the whole evening. She knew the obligations which he had conferred upon her father, and received him in a manner that confirmed his fascination. All other objects, all other pursuits, now yielded to the force of a passion, which, though so suddenly conceived, was sincere and fervent. Wherever she appeared, he

was constantly seen in attendance upon her ; he had eyes, ears, senses, for no other human being ; and so graciously were his assiduities accepted, that, in common with many others, who believed her to be influenced by ambition, I felt persuaded, that if he proposed to her, the disparity of their ages would prove no obstacle to his success. But we were mistaken ;—ambition, of the kind we imputed to her, formed no part of her character ; her apparent encouragement of Sir Reginald originated in a source the most remote from any design of the nature so generally suspected. The fact was, that previously to ever having seen him, she had spent a week at a lady's house near Windsor, where she had met and captivated the Baronet's eldest son, and not remained wholly insensible herself of his extraordinary merit. Independently therefore of the gratitude with which Sir Reginald's patronage of Signor Castelli induced her to regard him, the circumstance of his being the father of a young man she so greatly admired, contributed to give to her deportment towards him that peculiar softness and complacency which he has since

so invariably ascribed to a premeditated intention of deluding him. At the time I am speaking of, however, elate with hope, and unsuspecting that she and his son had ever met, he formed a plan for forwarding his own success, which, on the contrary, by domesticating her again with young Tourberville, revived and strengthened the favourable impression which each had made upon the other; and led, eventually, to all the ill consequences that followed. The project I allude to, was that of inviting her with her father and some other friends, to spend part of the approaching summer at East Vale. I must do Aurelia the justice to say, that attractive to her as this scheme could not fail to be, she had the self-denial and prudence to resist its execution during a considerable interval. In the end, however, she yielded; and under evil auspices entered an abode from which it was decreed, that she should only depart to effect the ruin of the man she loved, and to become the destroyer of her own peace and consideration. Difficult as were the means of establishing with her an undetected correspondence under his father's roof, the

enamoured young man, overcoming every obstacle, contrived to prosecute his suit so successfully, that before the smallest distrust was excited, he had prevailed upon her to acknowledge a reciprocal attachment, and to enter into a solemn engagement of becoming his at some future, but indeterminate, period. Meanwhile, the addresses of the Baronet were regularly carried on. He owns, that he had argued himself into a firm persuasion, that since the family honour was provided for, by the existence of an heir to the title and property, who was descended, on both sides, from Protestant parents, equal in rank, he could not be accused of doing any thing detrimental to the credit of the Tourberville name, by contracting a second marriage, though with an obscure foreigner of the Catholic persuasion, as unportioned as she was unallied. For his eldest son, nay, even for Charles, he would have deemed such a match preposterous; for himself, blinded by passion, he held it to be perfectly blameless. A formal declaration, accordingly, was, in due time, made to the lady, which, it may readily be supposed, circumstanced as

she was with regard to the son, filled her with dismay. Her embarrassed and evasive manner of replying to it, failed, however, to open the Baronet's eyes. He left her, full of exultation and confidence, to go and reveal his intentions to her father; whilst she flew to communicate the unwelcome tidings to her lover. Great was the consternation, and desperate was the step to which this information excited him. Convinced by it of the hopelessness of ever expecting to obtain the voluntary sanction of his father to his own views, he resolved upon immediate flight with the object of his passion, leaving to time, and the reviving influence of natural affection, the task of conciliating his offended parent; and not doubting to be recalled as soon as the first burst of resentment was overpast. And such would undoubtedly have been the case, had there been no rivalry between them; for Joscelin, this imprudent eldest son, was so notoriously Sir Reginald's favourite, that I, as well as others, often dreaded the effects that might be produced upon the character and temper of Charles by the unguarded display of that preference,

which his father never scrupled to make before him. To speak the truth, I greatly fear that his disposition *was* injured by the circumstance; it was not, originally, a generous one; and the constant sense of paternal injustice under which he secretly writhed, could contribute but little to improve it.

“On his departure, Joscelyn left a letter for his father, containing such exculpation of his conduct as he thought it would admit; and stating some of the particulars which I have been detailing; such as, the priority of his attachment to the Signora Castelli; her subsequent contract with him; and their total and mutual failure in penetrating the real motive of Sir Reginald’s attentions to her. This latter assertion, the Baronet, fiercely and indignantly, pronounced to be a falsehood. His rage at their flight was scarcely greater than, at what he termed, so gross an instance of hypocrisy. He considered himself as their dupe—as one fed with false hopes, to blind him to their mutual inclination; and the exasperating nature of the feelings consequent upon such a manner of viewing the subject, threw him into a fever,

from which, during many weeks, it was doubtful whether he would ever recover. Neither, my dear Miss Stavordale, could I, myself, entirely acquit the young people of disingenuousness on this head. It seemed to me *impossible* that they should not have been fully aware of the Baronet's serious intentions; every by-stander had long since discerned them; and the timid reluctance with which Aurelia had of late often appeared to suffer his assiduities, proved, that she attached to them far more meaning than belonged to the mere formalities of hospitality, or courtesies of passing admiration. At all events, one of the first acts which, on rising from a bed of sickness, Sir Reginald sternly resolved upon, was that of renouncing for ever the son who, not satisfied with supplanting him, had been accessory to the deception which their artificial mistress had practised upon his credulity. Wounded in a thousand points; in his personal pride, which was humbled by the slight he had experienced; in his fatherly attachment, hitherto so lavishly indulgent towards this treacherous son; and, finally, in his love,

which, though it had not been conceived '*wisely*,' had been felt '*but too well*;'—stricken in all these particulars, even time itself, the great assuager of wrath or suffering, failed to produce any change in the unfortunate obduracy of his spirit. He began by inflicting upon Joscelin the penalty of disinheritorship in its most unmitigated form; and followed up this rigorous act by a dreadful vow, never to admit either of the parties who had so heinously offended him, into his sight again! Their names were forbidden to be uttered in his hearing; and every letter that arrived with a foreign post-mark was destroyed unread, or given to his steward to be opened and burned, if it was found to proceed from the interdicted quarter. Aurelia's father, implicated in her disgrace, (whether justly or not, I am wholly ignorant,) quitted East Vale without being able to obtain an audience, and shortly after England. To what place he directed his course, and how the remainder of his life was passed, I never knew. Joscelin, discouraged by repeated failures, gradually remitted the hopeless labour of seeking to appease his inflexible pa-

rent ; and ceased also, much to my regret, giving any intelligence of himself, either to me, or his other English friends. All we could learn from travellers who had accidentally heard of his residence abroad, and sought access to him, was, that he admitted with reluctance any of his countrymen ; lived in great retirement in the neighbourhood of Florence, and, it was believed, supported the privations to which he was condemned, with courage and manliness. The next tidings that came gave notice of his death !—a death occasioned and accompanied by circumstances the most horrible. At four and twenty, and just eighteen months after his abrupt and severely-punished flight, he fell in a duel by the hand of one of his own countrymen ;—a dissipated young man of large fortune, (and, not much to Charles's credit, a particular friend of his,) who, meeting with Aurelia at some picture-gallery, and captivated by her grace and beauty, made enquiries concerning her, which led to so firm a persuasion that she was only the mistress of young Tourberville, that he instantly adopted measures to make known to her his passion, and to se-

duce her, by the splendour of his offers, from her present protector. Unhappily, one of his agents, less skilful than the rest, managed the negociation so ill, that he rendered himself obnoxious to the suspicions of Joscelin's English servant, who, revealing to his master the questionable proceedings of this wretch, was enjoined to follow up his observations, and too soon succeeded in detecting the whole nefarious scheme. In a transport of rage, Joscelin instantly dispatched a challenge to his dishonourable employer—met him the same day—and was conveyed home a corpse!"

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed I, interrupting Lady Horatia at this part of her dreadful story, "could you—could even Sir Reginald, withhold from poor Aurelia the pity with a calamity so overwhelming was calculated to inspire?"

"Whatever might be *my* feelings," answered she, "*pity for Aurelia* was one of the last sensations likely to arise in the bosom of Joscelin's father! The fatal tidings, at the same time that they re-animated all his former tenderness for that unfortunate young man, confirmed—I will not say implanted, for she

was already hateful to him—the most vehement, the most deadly sentiments of animosity against her. He called down imprecations upon her head, as the sole cause of his son's destruction. He loaded her with the guilt of having been the primary author of every evil that had struck to the root of his domestic happiness. She had robbed him of the heart—bereft him of the sight—and torn from him all the high expectations which the early excellencies of Joscelyn had encouraged him to cherish; and lastly, she had pointed, though another hand had fired, the pistol which deprived him of existence!"

"Ah, surely, madam," I cried, "there was injustice—there was inhumanity in such an accusation!—How otherwise was Aurelia responsible for his death, than by living with him in the deserted and exiled state to which the sentence of his father had doomed him? The mistake respecting her character which gave rise to the young Englishman's insulting attempt, was the natural consequence of so obscure a mode of existence. As the acknowledged daughter-in-law of Sir Reginald Tourberville, keeping up an open intercourse

with her husband's family, and mixing fearlessly with the world, can it be supposed that she would have experienced any such molestation?—Who, then (if all evils are to be aggravated by seeking to extend the blame attached to them beyond their obvious causes),—who, then, is so much in fault as the Baronet?"

"However just this reasoning may be," said Lady Horatia, faintly smiling, "it would have required a bolder heart than mine to urge it to Sir Reginald!—I could venture nothing beyond an endeavour to soften him, by guardedly repeating, from time to time, the testimonies I was able to gather in favour of Aurelia's private habits, as well as public conduct. The broken-hearted domestic who brought over the disastrous news of Joscelyn's fall, and who had lived with him from a boy, was profuse in her commendation. She was all, and more than all, he said, that his master could have hoped; fond of retirement; frugal in her expences; affectionately solicitous to make his home delightful; kind and gentle in temper;—every thing, in short, that could prove her the tenderest and most

devoted of wives.—At the word *wife*, impatiently as the Baronet had hitherto heard me, his ire became ungovernable. He violently protested his disbelief that there ever *had been* any marriage; attributed the insolent overtures of the young Englishman to some glaring levity in Aurelia's deportment; asked whether, had she been legally connected with his son, the documents which would have attested so important a fact would have been buried in obscurity? And ended, by strenuously requesting me—far from countenancing such a report by intimations similar to those which I had first uttered—to refute it without hesitation, from whatever quarter it might proceed.”

Shocked and alarmed at such an injunction, I hastily exclaimed, “Is it indeed possible that Sir Reginald, to gratify his vindictive spirit, could recommend so barbarous, so injurious a disavowal? Could he not perceive, that it reflected nearly as much odium upon his son as upon Aurelia? That it stamped him with dishonour as a violator of the rites of hospitality? a betrayer of confidence? a suborner of innocence?—Was he

so blinded as to persuade himself, that, by loading his deceased son with the guilt of seduction, he was offering to his memory an acceptable atonement for the rigour which he had exercised towards him when living?"

"At human delusions," resumed Lady Horatia, "I have long since, my dear Miss Stavordale, ceased to wonder:—when, or at what point, will they ever terminate?—Even those who imagine themselves the nicest analyzers of their own motives of action, are but too liable to these self-impositions: how much more, then, a man, who, like Sir Reginald, has been so long in the habit of yielding, intemperately, to every impulse of prejudice or passion?"

"You do not mean, Lady Horatia," interrupted I, with renewed affright,—“you do not mean, I trust, to prepare me for hearing, that the Baronet *still* professes to disbelieve the sanctity of the ties which bound Aurelia to his son?—Surely, he would not so far outrage the character of my brother, as to attribute to him the infamy of marrying Mr. Tourberville's mistress?"

"I grieve to say," resumed her ladyship,

“that this very marriage is what has tended to corroborate his incredulity of there having ever been a former one.—Nay, hear me with patience. He argues thus: It will only be eighteen years ago, next November, since Joscelyn and Aurelia absconded; and the information of Joscelyn’s death reached this country about a year and a half after that event. Yet Blanch,—the daughter of Mr. Stavordale, has almost attained her sixteenth birth-day!—Aurelia, then, must have given away her hand, ere the ashes of Joscelyn were cold;—ere he could have been in his grave a quarter of a year!—Had she been his wife, Sir Reginald asks, could she have done this? In decency, in honour, in gratitude, could the widow of a man killed in vindicating her reputation, could she, with such heartless precipitancy, have formed a new engagement?”

Struck by this statement, and ashamed of the very cause I was about to plead, yet unwilling, both for my brother’s sake and that of Blanch, entirely to abandon it, I now said: “Her reasons for this hasty connexion, could we fully comprehend them, might, perhaps,

palliate, if they could not entirely justify it. Poverty, Lady Horatia, may have been her sad inducement. Her father, for some years before his death, was utterly blind, and the calamity might be fast approaching, if not entirely confirmed, when Mr. Tourberville was snatched from her. She had nothing to hope from his family; she was destitute of all income save what was derived from the professional labours—now no longer practicable—of Signor Castelli; and she beheld him, probably, in a state too helpless to admit of her leaving him while she sought a precarious subsistence by the exertion of her own talents. If such were her circumstances, will not your ladyship allow, that they offer some apology for her conduct?”

Lady Horatia took my hand, and regarding me with great kindness, said, in a gentle and conciliating accent: “I feel for the pain my dear Miss Stavordale, which Sir Reginald’s doubts must inflict upon you; but I have this consolation to give you;—they are shared by none, or few, besides. The English servant of whom I have already spoken,

talked of his master's marriage as of an event at which he had been present. Various persons resident in Italy at that period, mentioned it likewise, on their return, as a circumstance almost universally believed ; and I have still in my possession, and shall ever carefully preserve, some letters addressed to me by Joscelin on his first going abroad, in which he repeatedly, and unequivocally, styles her his wife. I therefore, myself, give implicit credit to their having been solemnly united ; I also think it probable, that necessity rather than choice—rather, at least, than insensibility of Joscelin's merits, and carelessness of his fate—conducted her a second time to the altar. But I own, that the astonishing hastiness of this new alliance, revolts against my feelings so strongly, that though it was contracted with a brother of yours, be not offended at my saying, that it has sunk her in my esteem to a depth from which she can never arise. I have not the honour of the remotest acquaintance with Mr. Stavordale, and am far from meaning to depreciate his recommendations ;—he might be, and I dare say is, a man well suited to

engage affection ;—but were he all that poets ever feigned—the most accomplished *work of nature, that, from the prime creation ere she framed!*—Aurelia ought not to have shewn such disrespect to the memory of Joscelin as was implied by so expeditious an engagement with another.—He had but too many claims to be more permanently mourned.—To what, save his attachment to her, could she attribute his forfeiture of wealth, rank, country, and friends ? And to what but an excess of delicacy on the subject of her fame, could she ascri behis death ?—But, to bring this melancholy story to a close. On the loss of his eldest son, Sir Reginald, as I before observed, grieved, though in secret, deeply and bitterly. The unsatisfactory conduct, to say the least of it, of the second, tended in no respect to mitigate his affliction. Even ere the intrigue with the treacherous friend of his wife became suspected, Charles had given his father ample cause to look back with compunction to the severity which he had exercised towards his banished brother. The one had been imprudent, the other was vicious ; the one had robbed him

of his mistress, the other was bereaving him of his honour, and inflicting injury and sorrow upon all who were connected with him. How gladly would the infatuated father, when aware, too late, of the incorrigible licentiousness of Charles, have abated from the rigour of his former expectations, and compounded for errors to be quit of crimes! —Charles' offences seemed all to be the result of deliberate corruption;—those of Joscelin had originated (though their chastisement had been so implacable) in the vehemence of passion. Yet, deservedly as the Baronet had been harassed by self-upbraidings for his former harshness, it is with regret, I add, that there still lingers but too much of the same unrelenting principle in his character. The whole weight of indignation which used at first, in pretty equal portions, to be divided between Joscelin and Aurelia, seems now to be all accumulated upon the latter. The ill-advised celerity with which she married Mr. Stavordale, has exasperated Sir Reginald both as a father and a man—and one but little in the habit of allowing for the faults of others—beyond

my power to describe or appease. To speak plainly, in short,—for no circumlocution can make what I have to add otherwise than vexatious—he has intimated so strong a repugnance to the ratification of the engagement into which Horace has entered, that if it is fulfilled, there is every reason to apprehend, that all those brilliant advantages with which, in his ignorance of Blanch's descent he had promised to endow the marriage, will be withheld. Horace, however, though grieved that an uncle to whom he has so long looked up as a parent and a friend, should be thus ready to withdraw from him the sun-shine of his favour, hesitates not to forego every other earthly good, rather than renounce his pretensions to your niece. Of the tie upon his honour, he said very little ; *that*, he told Sir Reginald, spoke for itself: but of the utter impossibility of giving up a woman to whom his heart is now so devotedly attached,—he discoursed most eloquently. The Baronet heard him without either anger or surprise. His looks were more expressive of sorrow than of any stormy passion. He allowed that the fascinations of

Blanch were almost resistless ; and admitted also, that the sentiments expressed by Tremayne, were natural, and such as he had just reason for expecting to hear ; adding : “ I too well remember the time, Horace, when, in generous consideration of what you thought due to the interest of Charles, you refused to be recognised as my heir. I can therefore have small hope that you will now, to avoid the hazard of losing a part only of the very property which you rejected when entire, abandon your pursuit of a young creature who has gained such full ascendancy over you. I consequently trust, that you will do me the justice to believe, that as I think you highly superior to being influenced by threats of pecuniary privations, I am very far from expecting to work upon you by such unworthy means. Yet, allow me to say, that as a matter of principle, I hold myself bound scrupulously to abstain from coming forward in any way which might, to the world, seem to mark my approval of the alliance of so near a kinsman with the daughter of Aurelia Castelli. I have no proof, and very little belief that she ever was the wife of

my ill-fated son : but she was the partner—perhaps the instigator—of his flight:—for her he forfeited his birthright ; his distinguished station in society ; his dearest family ties ; and the country to which it had been my proud hope to see him become an honour and an ornament. This was not all ;—he hazarded for her his life, and lost it in the worthless conflict !—These were not trifling sacrifices : yet, how were they appreciated ? how requited by her ? In what way did she testify her gratitude for his affection, or her tenderness for his memory ?—By marrying a comparative stranger, almost the instant that his blood was shed !—Such an act renders her, in my estimation, completely detestable !—and dear to me as Blanch *has* been,—dear to me as you *are*—I acknowledge, that however unshaken your feelings towards her may remain, mine have undergone so total a revolution, that I shall never be able to behold her again without pain ; and still less, shall ever bear to hail as a niece, the child of Joscelin's unfeeling destroyer !—If, then, you accomplish this hateful union—and how can I hope to restrain you ?—our fellowship must be dis-

solved ;—the last, the sole surviving blessing of my age—your society and affection, must be resigned ;—and, for the brief period of existence that may yet be reserved for me, I must submit,—though neither childless, nor unconnected,—to be desolate and without a friend !”

“ And how did Mr. Tremayne,” enquired I, “ listen to this melancholy remonstrance ?”

“ With silent but respectful concern. The pitiable old Baronet—for with all his failings, his stubbornness, and the want of judgment evinced in thus fancying it a duty to inflict retribution upon one generation for the misdeeds of another—he *is* pitiable, punishes himself far more than any one else, by coming to such extremities. Except Joscélin, prior to his elopement, he has never loved any of his family with the warmth that he has loved Horace ; and I know, that in defiance of himself, he still cherishes Blanch most tenderly. If he adheres, therefore, to his declared intention of excluding this long-favoured young man, and his youthful mistress from his presence, I can represent to myself nothing more dreary than the repin-

ings with which he will perpetually be visited. How extraordinary is the conformation of a mind which can thus systematically resolve upon measures of inflexibility, that essentially interfere with no one's happiness but that of their projector; act as a check against nothing that he condemns; repair no passed misfortune; but compel him, uselessly, to endure all the dignity of solitary wretchedness."

"The circumstances that appear to me the most extraordinary," said I, "is his perfect unconsciousness, that he is playing the exact game appointed for him by his son Charles. The turn which affairs have taken, both Miss Tracy and myself feel convinced has been prepared by that gentleman's skilful machinations."

"Beware, my dear Miss Stavordale, how you utter such an insinuation before Horace! —I perfectly coincide in opinion with you and Helen: but Horace, too generous for suspicion, and ignorant of the train so craftily laid by his cousin to bring on a discovery, would be struck with such abhorrence were we to open his eyes to the real nature of the

transaction, that it is difficult to say how far his resentment might carry him."

I assured her, that I was fully aware of the necessity of caution ; and then could not forbear expressing some surprise, that all suspicion of Blanch's parentage should so long have lain dormant in Sir Reginald's mind.

"When she told him," said I, "that her mother was an Italian ; was the daughter of an artist ; had resided in England ; was an admirable musician,—is it not most wonderful, that he should have been assailed by no species of doubt ?—Does she bear no resemblance to that mother ? Is there nothing in her features, her cast of countenance, her voice, that might have reminded him of Aurelia ? and which, combined with the circumstances she so unequivocally avowed, might have led to an earlier detection.?"

"On the contrary, she very frequently, though not very forcibly, for the likeness is by no means remarkable, recalled the image of Aurelia to his mind ; particularly when she sung ; and the first time that he procured for me the gratification of hearing her, I perfectly recollect, as soon as the air was over,

his enquiring in a whisper, *who* she put me in mind of?—I readily named Aurelia; for, in truth, I had been thinking of her during the whole performance. Yet, the name and age of Blanch, held all suspicion as far aloof from my mind as from his. And besides, though her style of beauty may be as classical as her mother's, it is more girlish, more playful, more akin to that which we should attribute to Thalia, than was Aurelia's, when here, and when, in the meridian of her charms, *'she looked a goddess, and she moved a queen,'* and all eyes followed her with reverence as well as admiration. With the knowledge, too, that I had of the tragical event which so short a time before the birth of Blanch, had dissolved the connexion of Aurelia with Joscelin, was it possible that I could imagine her to be the mother of this child? No;—I rather figured to myself, Aurelia secluded in a cloister, where detached from the world, every hour that was not dedicated to religious duties, was spent in mourning over the violent end, and the untimely fate of the man who, to his own prejudice, had so tenderly loved her."

“ But now, dear Madam,” said I, “ what is the course which you wish us to pursue ? Are we to teach ourselves to look repulsively at Mr. Tremayne ? Are we to discountenance his visits ? And to exhort Blanch to withdraw from him her heart, and restore him to freedom ? ”

“ Has my conduct to her this evening,” resumed her ladyship, evidently hurt at what I had said, “ given you any just cause to suspect me of such a wish ? How treacherous would have been the affection which it was my aim to shew her, had it been assumed but as a prelude to dividing her from the man she loves ’ No, believe me ; I entertained not any view so inimical to her happiness. Blanch, individually, is still as acceptable to me as ever. There is nothing in the mother’s story which stigmatizes the daughter ; since the hasty re-marriage of which I complain, though it proved want of feeling, was no breach of morality ; it was nothing more than thousands, past, present, and to come, *have* done, *do*, and *will* do, in this country, and every other, as long as the world endures. From Aurelia, indeed, I

had expected better things: but what title have I to appoint my own standard of propriety as a rule from which no one is to deviate, without becoming subject, themselves and their posterity, to my reprobation and even vengeance? Far be such arrogance and illiberality from my mind! No; I am the friend of Sir Reginald Tourberville; but not the pliant adopter of his prejudices and antipathies: and in proof of this, I beg you, my dear Miss Stavordale, to press upon your niece, in my name, a most cordial invitation to accompany me into Hampshire when I quit East Vale, and to permit her marriage to be celebrated whilst she is under my roof. The reason I urge this request is, that I think the opposition which will now be made to the alliance by Sir Reginald, may render its accomplishment in his immediate vicinity unpleasant to her feelings. She has been in so peculiar and public a manner distinguished by him, that the total change which, I fear, will from henceforth be observable in his conduct towards her, can neither escape altogether the animadversions of the neigh-

bourhood, nor be considered by herself as a matter of indifference. She has loved him ; and, of course, will shrink with the greater reluctance from doing any thing which might be misconstrued by him into an act of defiance. Tremayne will be equally reluctant to submit to measures of procrastination ; and thus, perplexed between the desire of pleasing the nephew, and avoiding to aggravate the displeasure of the uncle, she will be placed in a very awkward predicament. By consenting to become my guest, much of this may be spared. The open sanction which I shall be giving to the union, by making arrangements for its taking place during the time she is domesticated with me, will convince the world, that though some of the relations of Horace object to the match, there are others who sincerely countenance it."

Warmly thanking Lady Horatia for the kindness of this truly considerate proposal, I ventured, however, to remonstrate against it, from the fear of its leading to an irreparable breach between her and the Baronet.

“ Such an apprehension, I hope, is superfluous,” said her ladyship : “ Sir Reginald knows that I think Horace perfectly right for adhering to his engagement ; he cannot therefore be surprised, that what I frankly profess to think right, I should openly endeavour to facilitate. Friends are not often preserved by acts of meanness ; and surely it would, in me, be a meanness the most abject, to concede, in practice, to prejudices which, in speculation, I have not hesitated, even with warmth, to reprobate. Horace Tremayne, had I the means, should, as my godson, as the only descendant of a brother, who, excellent as I thought him, appears in my estimation equalled by his successor,—Horace should be lavishly enriched by my bounty. But, though powerless, either in my life, or at my death, to improve his fortune, I will not be deterred from bestowing upon him all that *is* at my option—public consideration ;—I will not with cowardly remissness, deprive myself of the pleasure of testifying for him in the face of the world, all the esteem, affection, and interest, which is warm at my heart, and which no action of

his life, I sincerely believe, will ever excite in me a wish either to control or withdraw."

After a declaration so explicit, it would have been impertinent to combat longer against her ladyship's generous view of the subject; and I therefore promised to make known to Blanch the invitation with which she had honoured her. Our conversation then terminated: we rejoined the party in the drawing-room, and nothing more passed respecting the affair, till, at a late hour, the anxious Blanch followed me to my own chamber, and besought me to tell her the substance of all that I had heard.

Urgent as she was, there were many parts of the recent conference, which, having predetermined not to communicate to her, I cautiously endeavoured to evade touching upon. But her interrogations were so pointed; she, in a manner, *cross-examined* me with such incomparable address, that I found it utterly impossible to elude her inflexible resolution to know the worst. It was evident that her enquiries were instigated by

no merely puerile curiosity ; every fresh proof which she extorted from me of Sir Reginald's harsh condemnation of her mother seemed to pierce her to the heart : but when conscious that I marked her agitation, and shrunk from saying any thing which might further add to it, she commanded herself so well, and assumed such an air of firmness and tranquillity, that her entreaties that I would go on were irresistible. Yielding therefore, with whatever reluctance, to her wishes, I at length, though 'by parcels,' brought my relation to an end : every circumstance of the story was before her, and she deliberated long and silently, after I ceased speaking, upon their mortifying tenor. I gave her time to arrange her thoughts, and although anxious in the highest degree, to know the exact impression which had been made upon her mind, I waited with apparent patience for her voluntary confidence. She at last looked up, and seeing that my eye was fixed upon her, probably with an expression of pitying concern, she threw herself into my arms, and wept without control. I hung over her with all

the tenderness which her distress was so well calculated to call forth, and spoke words the most soothing and encouraging to her that my heart could prompt. She redoubled her caresses on hearing me utter language so affectionate, and still clung to me, as if regarding me as the only friend upon whose support she might henceforward venture to rely. At length, in broken accents, she mournfully exclaimed: "I am now humbled—humbled, my dearest aunt, to the very dust! This is a story to sink me in the estimation of every human being; it seems even to have sunk me in my own. And yet there still tenaciously clings to my heart, an inexplicable but positive conviction of my mother's uprightness, which not even the chain of circumstances I am compelled to allow bear so hard against her, and am of necessity reduced to hear without presuming to controvert,—has power to diminish. Had these accusations been directed against any individual of whom I had had no previous knowledge, I *must* have believed them, so well do they appear attested: but levelled as they are, against one I lived with for years

—saw, heard, observed, and followed, day by day, from my very infancy,—the only sentiment which they excite, is keen regret at my utter inability to communicate to others the deeply-rooted opinion I entertain of their falsehood. I mean not, however, to charge Sir Reginald with wilful misrepresentation; he no doubt sincerely credits the tale that he has related; and so, assuredly, does Lady Horatia; and so, my dearest aunt, must you, and every one else who hears it, except those, who, having seen my mother's noble countenance, and marked her virtuous life, would spurn at the idea of suspecting her, as at a violation of all probability or common-sense. But that noble countenance is now laid in the dust; that virtuous life is ended; and my solitary testimony, against accusers so powerful, must weigh as nothing in the contrary scale; I do not expect it should be otherwise. One good purpose, however, will be answered by my persevering in being so incredulous: it will serve to comfort my own mind. When all who know me believe me to be the daughter of a woman who disgraced herself by

treachery to the benefactor of her father; who allured into banishment a young man of high promise; lived with him as his mistress, and compassed his destruction by the lightness of her conduct; when all who listen to this tissue of depravity, give faith to it, and despise me as the child of such a parent, I shall still have the secret, but inestimable gratification, of believing, that, could every particular connected with so vile a story be accurately known, its heinousness would vanish. One thing alone presses heavily upon my heart: the undeniable precipitancy of my mother's second marriage; there, I grieve to say, that I can find no defence for her in the slightest degree satisfactory even to my own partial feelings. Penury must have caused it: but, good heaven! how little could I have imagined that any penury, however abject, could have driven so firm and constant a mind to the commission of an act so ill-timed, so repugnant to delicacy, so every way indecorous and unbecoming! Over this part of the story, would that I could cast a veil too thick to be again ever penetrated even by myself' But

I have unwarily said more than I can justify to my own sense of duty : and far more, I am well convinced, than I could endure to hear even insinuated by any other human being."

She would then have risen to retire for the night ; I delayed her a few minutes longer, by saying : " What answer, my dearest Blanch, would you have me return to Lady Horatia's friendly and cordial invitation ?"

Tears again sprung to her eyes, and with great emotion she replied : " I can come to no decision to-night, my kind aunt : I must take more time to consult my own strength. I would not, for the vain-glory of appearing capable of a generous sacrifice, involve myself in unmeaning professions, uttered merely with the hope of hearing them opposed. My resolution, when once taken, will, I trust, be steady and unalterable : but I cannot deny that my whole soul recoils from the measure, which yet, I fear, it would be selfishness not to adopt."

" What measure ? What resolution, dear Blanch, are you speaking of ?" cried I,

alarmed by this mysterious language ; “ do not go, I entreat, till you have enabled me better to understand you. A decision which is to be irrevocable calls for more than usual circumspection ; and, young and inexperienced as you are, ought not to be formed without applying for the opinion and concurrence of some friend, older, and more mature in judgment, than yourself. Let *me* be that friend, my dearest niece. You can never refer to one who takes a warmer interest in your happiness, or whose counsel would be given with more anxiety for your credit, and tenderness for your feelings. Tell me, then, my Blanch, what is it that you meditate ? Or tell me, at least, that whatever may be your purpose, you will not be rash enough to determine upon considering it as irreversible.”

“ Do not, my most dear aunt,” resumed she, “ distrust the gratitude with which your kindness fills me : but suffer me now to leave you, and to-morrow morning I will, without any reservation, communicate to you the result of my night’s deliberation.”

“ And you will come to me with a mind

still open to conviction? You will come to me, not merely to impart your intentions, but to advise with me as to their propriety?"

"You are terribly afraid," cried she, forcing a cheerless smile, "that I shall resolve upon some desperate act of overstrained heroism! But of that there is no danger. You may rest assured that I neither mean to trifle with my own happiness, nor to disturb that of others, for the conceited purpose of awakening wonder, or the unworthy one of exciting regret."

Perceiving that my endeavours to bring her to a fuller explanation were hopeless, I was now obliged to let her depart. Yet I suffered her to go with great reluctance; for my fear was, that she meant to argue herself into a persuasion that it was right to renounce her engagement with Tremayne, rather than suffer him to forfeit any part of his uncle's inheritance. I would not, however, express too plainly my apprehensions; since, if they were unfounded, it would be worse than useless—it might be dangerous to suggest such an idea to her mind. What

I had anticipated, she might suppose that others would expect; and the dread of being considered as the impediment to her lover's prosperity, might influence her to become the destroyer of his and her own happiness.

Whilst dressing in the morning, I was rejoiced to perceive from my window Mr. Tremayne approaching the house, at an hour even earlier than that at which he usually comes to partake our family breakfast. I immediately determined, that the answer to Lady Horatia's invitation which I was to receive from Blanch at her rising, should be pronounced in his presence; assured that, however unfavourable might be its nature, *his* pleadings, *his* representations, would far outweigh any that I could utter. Accordingly, I hastened down stairs, to avoid being found alone by her; and on entering the breakfast room, was met by Mr. Tremayne, who was still the only person visible in that part of the house.

"This," cried he, seizing my hand, and drawing me eagerly forward, "this opportunity of privately conferring with you, is

exactly what I wished, but despaired of obtaining. I have no words to describe to you how vehement is my anxiety to know the effect produced upon my more-than-ever dear Blanch, by the distressing communication which you were commissioned last night to make to her. Tell me, I conjure you, how she bore the shock of such an attack upon the reputation of a mother whom she almost idolizes?"

I repeated to him as nearly as I could the heads of what had passed.

"And what," exclaimed he, "is the fearful and vaguely intimated resolve on which she required to spend a night in deliberation ere she could prevail upon herself to announce it? I tremble to anticipate its purport! Ah, surely, surely my dear Miss Stavordale, she cannot be so unjust to my claims—so void of sensibility—so unstable in affection, as to meditate the barbarous design of dissolving the contract into which she has entered with me?"

I acknowledged to him frankly, that from a mistaken sense of honour, such was, I believed, her determination: but, at the same

time, I exhorted him earnestly to avoid hinting at such an apprehension, upon the same principle that had rendered me silent upon it the preceding night.

We had time for no further parley, as the family now began assembling for breakfast, and the subject was not of a nature to be publicly discussed.

Blanch, with very unwonted delay, was the last to make her appearance. She wore the air of one who, anxious to escape observation, assumes an expression of compelled serenity, unconscious of the pallid cheek and abstracted eye, which betray the mental disquietude so vainly struggling for concealment. On her first entrance, I thought I saw some indication of a wish to avoid the customary attentions of Mr. Tremayne: but she soon gave up the ineffectual attempt, and yielding with gentleness, though with unalterable gravity, to his guidance, was conducted by him to her usual seat next his own. My mother, as yet unacquainted with the particulars of the conversation which had passed between Lady Horatia and me, contemplated with mingled wonder and appre-

hension the altered aspect of her dejected grandchild; whilst Philippa watched her with an intentness that never relaxed, and that resulted, it was very obvious, far more from curiosity than from sympathy or affection. Miss Tracy, infected with a portion of her young friend's seriousness, though still in ignorance of much of its cause, scarcely spoke, except to address to her some expression of kindness, and scrupulously avoided giving her the slightest reason to think that she was observing her with peculiar attention. My father saw that something was wrong, and looked from one to the other, with evident perplexity and concern: but he abstained from uttering any remarks, and with his usual patience and good temper awaited a more favourable moment for asking questions. The two girls, Jane and Martha, though palpably aware, as their demure countenances testified, that the present was no time for tittering and small-talk, yet shewed infinitely less anxiety to penetrate into the mystery of our unwonted gravity, than to hurry through their breakfast, and regain in some other part of

the house the liberty of being as unceasingly loquacious as they chose.

At length the moment arrived when Tremayne, burning with impatience to converse with Blanch apart, was enabled to draw her into another room, and to supplicate for an explanation of the ill-boding solemnity that so obviously marked her deportment. She had asked me to be present at their conference; and, with no inconsiderable anxiety, I followed them to the—at that hour—deserted drawing-room.

“Blanch,” cried Tremayne, the instant the door was closed, “you fill me with undefinable but acute disturbance! Your looks, when directed towards me, denote a frigid reserve that petrifies me. It seems an effort to you to permit my approach; to answer me when I address you; to suffer even my eye to rest upon your face. Blanch, my unkind, but ever-beloved Blanch, how have I deserved such treatment? What does so terrible a change prognosticate? Speak to me;—the suspense in which I am now held is too painful to be longer endured!”

“*I will* speak to you,” replied she, in a

tone of the softest conciliation, yet trembling so much that she was forced to hold by the table near which she stood—"I came hither purposely to confide to you all that is passing in my mind. If I have appeared to you cold and repulsive, forgive me ; I meant only to avoid exposing myself to the danger of being influenced too powerfully by the tenderness of manner which you have now accustomed me to expect from you. I acknowledge, however, that I was wrong. My firmness must not be dependent upon the greater or less degree of distinction with which you treat me, but upon my own intimate conviction, that what I intend is right and indispensable. Never may I again be so unwise, or so unkind, as to fancy that it is necessary, in order to gain strength for the performance of what I consider as a duty, to behave to you with an appearance of ingratitude which might alienate your good opinion!—What is there on earth, dear Horace" (it was the first time I had ever heard her address him by that name), "that I value so highly?—Nothing.—My whole heart is yours ;—there is no species of adversity that

my imagination can represent to me, which, were it to befall you, I would not more joyfully share than the prosperity of any other man!—You are willing to resign the wealth lately proffered to you by your uncle, rather than renounce your generous attachment to me. I can readily enter into your feelings; for I know myself to be capable of as lofty a disdain of riches as your own. You are willing, rather than give me up, to be discarded from your uncle's presence. Even that, grievous as it would be to me to occasion the estrangement, I could permit you to hazard; for, judging of you by myself, I should feel assured, that whilst you loved and were beloved by the companion of your choice, the bitterness of such a sacrifice could not but be sensibly alleviated. What then, you will ask, is it, that makes me shrink with dismay from the thought of becoming yours?"——

"What indeed?" interrupted Tremayne, breathless with terror—"Oh, Blanch! is *this* your devoted affection? Is *this* the proof you mean to give me that your heart is wholly mine? Indifferent to the loss of

fortune,—submissive to the sentence of banishment from my uncle,—what is there then that can provoke you to the inhumanity of joining with him, in wishing to consign me to hopelessness and sorrow?”

Touched by the heart-felt tone of reproach in which this was asked, Blanch could now no longer command the same composure with which she had hitherto addressed him. Tears burst from her eyes, and turning towards me, her head sunk upon my bosom, whilst, in an accent of deep distress, she cried, “Oh, my dearest aunt, how hard a task have I undertaken to perform! Assist me in its execution;—assist me in persuading this too-generous Tremayne, that the union for which he is so solicitous ought not, as we are now circumstanced, to take place. Had Sir Reginald objected to me on any plea but that of the misconduct of my mother, I could have braved his utmost displeasure; but a prohibition founded upon a belief that I am the child of a woman lost to reputation, it would be dishonouring Mr. Tremayne to permit him to defy.”

“Had such,” impetuously cried Tremayne, “been the opinion of the sister of my father—of the untemperizing and high-minded Lady Horatia—think you, my too sensitive Blanch, that she would still be so zealous a friend to the match !”

“Lady Horatia,” resumed Blanch, “has letters in her possession which satisfy her own individual scruples, by proving, as she fancies, the innocence of my mother of at least *one* of the charges, and that perhaps the heaviest, which is brought against her. But these letters, though undoubtedly their existence and purport is known to your uncle, have effected no change in *his* judgment of the affair. They cannot therefore be considered as conclusive evidences in my mother’s favour. Nothing but a regular certificate of her first marriage could bring conviction to Sir Reginald’s mind. Were that attainable, though he might still hate her, he would at least do justice to her fame, and your connexion with her daughter might cease to be regarded by him as a stain upon your honour.”

“That such a certificate exists,” cried Tre-

mayne, “ I have not the shadow of a doubt ; but how is it to be brought to light ? Your father is a wanderer on the earth, whom his nearest connexions know not where to address. Your maternal grandfather is no more. What other depositors are likely to remain, to whom such a document might have been entrusted ? Where was the marriage solemnized ? And where shall we now hope to find a living witness of an event which must, from the circumstances attending it, have necessarily been conducted with so much privacy and caution ? Blanch, you throw too many difficulties in my path ! Why all this needless nicety ? Have I a single doubt to remove ? Has Lady Horatia any ? Had your father, when he married Aurelia himself, the slightest distrust of the legality of her first engagement ? Then, for whom so much overstrained delicacy ? For my relentless and prejudiced uncle ? Ah, Blanch ! is it equitable to sacrifice my happiness—is it honourable to forfeit your own vows, in subserviency to the new and unreasonable opposition which he makes to-day to

the very alliance which he so cordially sanctioned yesterday?"

"Before you condemn me with such severity," mildly, yet earnestly, replied Blanch, "represent to yourself, fairly and impartially, the effect that will be produced upon all who know us by his avowed hostility to our union. It must have been observed, that he has distinguished me with the most flattering predilection; and it has long appeared, that he entertains for you the affection of a father. When, therefore, it comes to be generally understood, that, on account of our marriage, he has cast us both off, will not conjecture be busy to discover the cause? And what cause is so likely to be assigned, as one prejudicial to my character? Will it not very naturally be supposed, that unless some strong objection had come to light respecting me—something black and terrible—Sir Reginald would never, after so openly approving your addresses, have forbidden us his presence, and determined upon punishing your adherence to me, by depriving you of the fortune which he had, for years, given

you, and all your friends, reason to imagine that he destined for you? I am convinced, that were I an unconcerned spectator of this transaction, I should be unavoidably induced to come to some conclusion extremely disadvantageous to the lady. I should be tempted to believe, either that she had been found guilty of some gross impropriety herself, or that something infamous had reached his ears relating to her connexions on the continent! Would it be a very meritorious proof of my regard, to suffer you to ratify your engagement under such circumstances? No; it would appear to the world (to all *our* little world, at least), were I now to become your wife, that, careless of your interest, I had taken advantage of your attachment, to hasten forward a marriage destructive to your prospects, injurious to your respectability, and the sole cause of your being disunited for life from an uncle, who, but for me, might, to his last hour, have been as warmly your friend, as whilst acting for you in the capacity of a guardian, and supplying to you the place of a father. These are not imputations, Mr. Tremayne, which even

your influence, persuasive as it is, shall induce me to hazard. I will never give my hand to one who would be lowered in the estimation of society by receiving it. I will never consent at once to disgrace and impoverish you. If we could have been poor, without incurring censure, I repeat from my heart, that, with you, there is no degree of indigence to which I would not readily, cheerfully, joyfully, have submitted; but I am determined steadily to resist becoming the occasion of your forfeiting, at one blow, affluence, credit, and your uncle's long-tried affection."

Stung to the soul by the firmness of this language, Tremayne, with more anger than I had believed it possible that any provocation from Blanch could have awakened in him, vehemently exclaimed:

"Blanch, Blanch, you will drive me to madness! Why mock me by these hollow professions of attachment, whilst torturing me by such cool, deliberate evidences of aversion! Are you, indeed, so self-deceived as to imagine that your reasonings are dictated by affection?—by generosity?—by a

jealous regard for my honour? Ah, how gladly, were it possible, would I share in the delusion! But a wisdom so premature, that, at sixteen, it can oppose itself to the pleadings of a lover with such unimpassioned circumspection—such calm sententiousness—can originate only in indifference—in repugnance, rather—or in feelings secretly propitious to some other man! Be consistent in your cruelty, Blanch; and if the heart which perhaps was always rather yielded than given to me, has strayed to another master, throw aside this assumption of magnanimity; and frankly acknowledge, that the feeble interest which I once held in it, is for ever at an end. I may become more hopeless by such an avowal, but scarcely more miserable; since, strange as it may sound, I think that it would give me less pain to know that you sacrificed me to a rival, than to believe, that I had treasured up my heart with one, whom no tenderness could soften—no sympathy could influence—and whose nature was accessible to no emotion but that of pride!”

Blanch, whose varying colour during this indignant speech, testified the strongest agi-

tation, scarcely gave him time to conclude it, ere she exclaimed—

“ I can bear much from you, Mr. Tremayne;—I can bear the accusation of pride—of obstinacy—nay, even of insensibility; for I have made you angry, and it may be natural that anger should render you unjust. But I will *not* bear to be told, that I am a hypocrite—that I have assigned false motives for my determination—or that I ever sought to deceive you, or any other human being, by insincere professions ! I may not be capable of that wild, romantic sort of love, which would give me merit in your eyes, but which, in my own, would appear to border upon insanity; that love which would overleap every obstacle opposed to it, either by justice or principle, and which would set at nought all idea of self respect. But, of an affection that prefers the advantage of its object to its own indulgence ; of an affection not to be shaken by undeserved reproach, or obliterated by time and absence—I believe myself to be far more capable than any enthusiast whom you might wish me to resemble.” Then, pausing a moment, and

raising her eyes anxiously to his face, she presently added, “ I see no relenting in your looks—you are still resentful, and still incredulous. Mr. Tremayne, what can make you so unlike yourself? What can influence you to persevere in thinking me mean enough to be a dissembler?”

“ The utter improbability that you could, were there still one feeling of tenderness alive for me in your heart, be so impenetrably adverse to my cause! I have most solemnly assured you, that my own individual conviction of the purity of your mother is firm and unshaken. I cannot believe, that had her principles been perverted, and her conduct incorrect, she could have given you an education so far beyond all praise; an education which has, at so early a period of life, formed your character upon the model of every thing, which, *till now*, I have thought most admirable! I cannot believe, that had she been the reverse of what you have taught me to think her, Mr. Stavordale would have made her his wife. Lady Horatia entertains the same opinion. She is eager to extend to us the benefit of her countenance, which,

she justly believes, will, from her known delicacy on the subject of reputation, form an ample counterpoise to the obduracy of Sir Reginald, and preserve us effectually from being prejudiced in the estimation of the world. We risk, therefore, none of that dishonour which you so gloomily prognosticate. I cannot, indeed, affirm that we shall be no losers, in a pecuniary point of view, by our marriage; but if, as you assert, that consideration has no weight with you, why, let me once more ask—why, dear, though impracticable Blanch, should you refuse to confirm my promised happiness? Trifle not, to satisfy a vain punctilio, with the expectations you have authorized; reflect, how far more serious will be the disgrace attending an abrupt and unexplained breach of the faith which you are known to have pledged to me, than any of those chimerical evils which would arise from the fulfilment of our contract. You will have nothing to allege against me that can vindicate your renunciation—you will be the sole party in the deed; for be assured, that I will never affect to have voluntarily concurred in it: I will, on

the contrary, openly protest against your right to pursue such a measure;—I will affirm, as I now do to yourself, that you mistake your duties; that your first obligation is to *me*, whom you have bound yourself to by a promise, which nothing but my consent can absolve you from performing. Believe me, the odium which a young woman incurs, by inflicting upon an honourable suitor an injury of such a nature, adheres to her character, more or less, through life!”

“Do not,” said Blanch, unmoved by these menaces, “do not, Mr. Tremayne, compel me, step by step, to retrace the ground over which I have already passed. Your belief of my mother’s integrity—that of Lady Horatia—gratify my feelings, but do not dispel the scruples which you are pleased to term chimerical. I have nothing to bring into your family as a recompense for introducing into it discord and animosity.—I have no wealth—no consequence—no rank—I have not even the negative merit of descending from a parent who has incurred no reproach. I am content, therefore, rather to endure the limited censure which, as Blanch Stavordale,

I may encounter, by dissolving my contract with you, than to venture into the wider field of disapprobation which I should be exposed to as Blanch Tremayne."

At this critical period of their dialogue, the eyes of Tremayne, attracted to the window by the shadow of some passing object, rested, for an instant, on the figure of Lord John Alcester. Already worked up to a pitch of irritation, greater, I firmly believe, than he ever before experienced, the sight (long since obnoxious to him) of this nobleman, in the present agitated state of his feelings, exasperated him to a degree of fury that filled me with alarm for the soundness of his intellects. He averred, that Lord John came by appointment; that he had formed a deliberate scheme to supplant him, and charged Blanch with being a confederate in the iniquitous design. "For him," continued he, addressing her with a mingled expression of passion and anguish, "for him you thus trample upon my feelings—thus coolly submit to the imputation of perjury, of heartlessness, of treachery!—Your early admiration of him is now no longer a lurking, undefined emotion

—it is a palpable preference—an unrepressed attachment ; and his daily visits here, credulously attributed, by your family, to the influence of Philippa, are paid with no other view, than to confirm the triumph which he has so insidiously gained over me!”

I here, equally unable and unwilling to listen any longer to such wild and preposterous accusations, hastily interrupted him, exclaiming: “This is too much, Mr. Tremayne! I cannot stand by, and passively permit you to hold such language. Blanch is as innocent of any perfidious connivance in Lord John’s designs, as, in my conscience I sincerely believe, that *he* is of any intention to practice upon her faith. They have no communication that is not as open as the day. . . .”

I was proceeding, when, turning pale as ashes, and suddenly catching my arm—whilst, with eyes almost starting from their sockets, he directed my observation, by the agonized intensity of his own, to the half averted face of Blanch—he faintly cried: “See there the evidence of my veracity!—Look at the burning blush upon those con-

scious cheeks, and tell me—do I wrong her?”

I was thunderstruck!—Blanch wore, indeed, an air of such guilty confusion; the heightened glow of her complexion was so extraordinary vivid; and the whole of her deportment had something in it so inexplicably singular, that, lost in wonder, I surveyed her with silent dismay, and felt half tempted to believe that my senses were playing me false. That assertions, which I had regarded as the mere ravings of disappointment—the random flights of a distempered imagination, should, in any degree be *true*, appeared to me inconceivable!—A creature so inartificial—so frank, both by disposition and principle—so modest in her demeanour towards men—that *she* should have entangled herself whilst under engagements to one lover, in a clandestine intercourse with another, surpassed all my powers of comprehension!—How long, if undisturbed, I might have stood contemplating her in speechless astonishment, I know not:—Mr. Tremayne, by an abrupt removal of the hand which had tremblingly grasped my arm, restored me

to recollection. I turned to address him, but was shocked at sight of his disordered aspect. Despair and resentment, of the most indignant character, were stamped upon his lowering brow ; his lips compressed, and denoting the strongest mental conflict ; his dark eyes flashing with almost insupportable lustre ; the sternness of his frown—in short, the whole expression of his countenance was so portentous (a countenance which, till then, I had ever delighted to gaze upon), that after a momentary survey, I withdrew my observation, too much pained, as well as alarmed, by the sinister passions which it indicated, to hazard a second look. Meanwhile, slowly approaching Blanch, who, mute and motionless, had never raised her eyes since his last vehement apostrophe, he stood a few seconds gloomingly regarding her ; and then, in a tone of forced calmness, though unutterably severe, said, “ I am thankful that you make no attempt to disprove with your lips what your countenance has so plainly expressed ;—nature, in this instance, prevails over art. My destiny and

yours, it appears, are, from henceforward, to be irrevocably severed;—be it so: where hearts are sundered, why should hands be joined? We still, however, must respectively possess a fearful power to tinge with darkness the current, though divided, of each others lives!—I go to make trial of that power; and if my success in wringing *your* heart, is equal to that with which you have tortured *mine*—even I may yet be compelled to pity you!”

He would then have quitted the room: but Blanch, terrified by the ambiguous austerity of such an address, impetuously flew after him, and endeavouring to seize his hand, cried: “Tremayne—unjust, ungenerous Tremayne!—Whither would you go?—Stay—I implore you, stay—and explain these fearful intimations!”

“Their explanation,” he fiercely answered, shrinking from her touch, and rushing towards the door, “will reach you but too quickly!”

Blanch would yet have followed him; but, anticipating her purpose, he darted out of

the room with such precipitation (closing the door violently after him), crossed the hall, and ran out of the house with a fleetness so totally beyond her power to emulate, that renouncing the hopeless effort, she turned, deeply sighing, towards me, and said, "Something must be done, my dearest aunt,—and that instantly—to counteract his unhallowed purpose! He meditates,—I am sure he does—a challenge to Lord John,—Write to his friends at East Vale—at Bovil Court;—write to Mr. Westcroft;—to any, or every body,—no matter who, provided you succeed in preventing the horrors which I see impending!"

I was too well convinced of its expediency, to hesitate a moment in complying with this injunction. In all haste, I addressed and forwarded a short note to Mr. Westcroft, and one to Lady Horatia, each of which, Blanch, standing by trembling with impatience, folded and sealed as fast as it was written, and then delivered, herself, to its respective messenger, exhorting them, in the strongest terms, to use the utmost dispatch in their conveyance.

When this measure, the only one which for the moment we could resolve on, had been put in practice, I very seriously required Blanch to account for the strange discomposure into which she had been thrown, on hearing me assert her innocence of all private communication with Lord John.—“Is it credible,” cried I, “that you can have been pursuing a system of deception so widely differing from all that you have ever taught us to expect from you? So nearly allied to all that I have ever heard you profess to hold in abhorrence?—Is there, indeed, the slightest degree of confederacy between that nobleman and you? I cannot bear to think it possible!”

“Then, do *not* think it, my dearest aunt,” cried she, sickening at the name of a man who had already cost her so much uneasiness. “There is no cause whatever for your distrust;—at least, as far as it relates personally to me. I cannot at this moment, with my mind so very differently occupied, enter into a full detail of the many trifling subjects of complaint which Lord John Alcester has recently given me. I looked upon them as

unmeaning instances of folly, proceeding from an inveterate habit of flirtation, and, except by repulsive looks, and dry, laconic, answers, thought it unnecessary to bestow any attention upon them. He knew that I was engaged; and, notwithstanding the unwelcome pressures of the hand, and the gallant whispers with which, at every favorable opportunity, he annoyed me, he still paid such public court to my aunt Philippa, that I should have thought it ridiculous to alarm myself, or any body else, with an idea, that he could, strange as was his behaviour, be at all in earnest. But this morning, a different opinion of his views was forced upon me, by the reception of a letter, which Clavering brought to my bed-side at an early hour, firmly believing that it came from Mr. Tremayne. Never was astonishment greater than mine when I opened and read it!—Here it is, my dear aunt!—tell me, when you have perused it, whether it was fit to be shown to Mr. Tremayne, or even mentioned to him?—Here, also, is a copy of my answer to it.”

Indignant at the duplicity of Lord John,

I received the papers in silence, too eager to examine them for either question or delay.

His lordship's letter was as follows :

“ On my return to East Vale, last night, I was informed, lovely Blanch, that all is finally over between you, and the once-envied Tremayne.—I am most anxious to learn how you bear this sudden and unmerited blow ;—with fortitude and spirit, I trust. When I call it *sudden*, however, I mean but to speak of it in reference to your own expectations ; mine have, for some time, been led to an anticipation of this event too well authorized, to permit a doubt of its occurring. Hence, my lingering residence in your vicinity ; hence, my guarded, but sedulous endeavours, to awaken your attention to the seriousness and sincerity of my passion. In making application, thus early for your favour, I cannot flatter myself that I shall be immediately successful.” (Modest Lord John !) “ Time, I well know, must be allowed you to overcome the distressing nature of your present feelings : but will not its influence be aided, by the consciousness that, though *one* of your subjects has been com-

perelled to renounce his allegiance, another more master of his own actions, is impatient to prove his unfeigned and steady loyalty. I have no uncle to disinherit me ; I have no personal or family prejudices to combat against. On *your* decision alone, my cause depends. Suffer me to hope, that, eventually, you will not be unpropitious to my suit. From the first hour that I beheld and conversed with you, your beauty, sense, and talents, made an impression upon my heart which every subsequent interview has but tended to confirm. Constantly encouraged to look upon your proclaimed engagement merely as an unsubstantial obstacle to my chance of acceptance, I have cherished the consolatory idea, till it has gained such powerful ascendancy over my imagination that I scarcely dare ask myself, what would be the effect upon my feelings of a total disappointment.—Inflict not upon me, fairest Blanch, so severe a trial. You shall protract at your own pleasure, the period of my probation : all that I now solicit, is the privilege of standing foremost upon the list of every future candidate for your favour. England

Italy, Switzerland—whatever country you prefer, will be dear to me for your sake, and shall become the land of my choice.

“ I am, with the most fervent admiration,

“ devotedly yours,

“ JOHN ALCESTER.”

Having read this precipitate, and singularly ill-timed declaration, I turned with impatience to the answer which it had received.—It was short and ran thus :

“ My Lord,

“ Neither at this, nor at any future time, shall I ever have more than my thanks to offer for the honour which your Lordship has intended me.

“ I am, my Lord,

“ Your very obedient humble servant,

“ BLANCH STAVORDALE.”

Had I been in a laughing mood, the peremptory brevity of this note, contrasting so remarkably with the diffuse eloquence of Lord John, would have amused me : but at that moment I could admit no ludicrous thought into my mind.—I returned the two papers to their owner, and merely said : “ I am ashamed, my dear Blanch, of the petulance

with which I had *almost*—not *quite*—been unjust enough to accuse you of disingenuousness and coquetry. Here is a proof incontrovertible of your plain-dealing!—My only apprehension is, that according to established etiquette, your answer is scarcely civil enough.”

“I wrote it,” answered she, “under the influence of anger, after having passed a sleepless and miserable night, which had left me in a state of irritation well calculated, I own, on a slighter provocation than this, to make me display ill temper. That Lord John *meant* me no indignity, which is all that the strongest advocate can say in his favour, is but a poor apology for the arrogance of such a letter. I have heard grand-mamma observe, and was much struck by the remark, than when any individual has committed an offence against the feelings of others, there is nothing she hates more than the affectation of candour with which it is common to hear people exclaim: “I dare say he meant no harm!” Why then *not* mean some good? Why, unless a man is an idiot, is he to be pardoned, upon so poor

a plea, for going about giving pain? As to Lord John, though he is anything but wise, he could not so completely mistake between right and wrong, as to be blind to the indelicacy of addressing me at *such* a moment, and in *such* a manner, on a subject which I have so plainly and uniformly shown him, would be unwelcome to me. Had he *meant* well—that is to say, had he meant any thing but to indulge his own conceit, he could never, after the discouragement he has received from me, have taken a step, which has obliged me to give him a lesson I had so little wish to trouble him with.”

“He has been the dupe,” said I, “for some deeper purpose than is immediately apparent, of Mr. Tourberville. The nameless informant, whose high authority he alludes to, I have no hesitation in believing to be that gentleman. His views in planning to disunite you from his cousin, I can well understand: but his object in secretly instigating Lord John to undermine Tremayne, and now so prematurely to attempt succeeding him, I cannot so easily develop. It is possible, but seems really too diabolical to be

probable, that his only aim has been, to prepare materials for a quarrel between the two pretenders, which might end fatally to one, or both, and remove effectually the victor, and the vanquished, out of his way."

"Oh, that I," exclaimed Blanch, relapsing into all the agitation that had shaken her on the first surmise of this dreaded conflict, "Oh, that I, the wretched cause of such disgraceful strife, were far, far removed from the spot, where I seem fated to occasion so much evil!"

"You are *not* its cause, my dear Blanch;—you are but a joint sufferer with others from the machinations of a bad man. Comfort yourself with the reflection, that no levity, no guile, no selfishness on your part, has led to the present state of affairs. You have invariably conducted yourself with a sincerity the most honourable; and you have this day given a proof of fortitude and disinterested generosity, which, to say the least of it, manifests a degree of self-command far greater, I fear, than under similar circumstances, I ever could have displayed!"

"Ah, does it not almost seem to manifest

coldness of heart, obduracy, exaggerated caution? Every thing that must render me hateful in Mr. Tremayne's eyes?"

"By half a word, my sweet Blanch," cried I, with reviving hope, "you might remove such impressions. Did you not assure me last night, that you had no design to proceed to measures so decisive?—that you neither meant to 'trifle with your own, nor to disturb the happiness of others?' Has the explanation of this morning been in consonance with that assurance? Why have you adopted such harsh measures?—and why, if you regret, should you adhere to them?—Can you doubt the transport with which Tremayne would hear you retract a resolution he so bitterly deploras? Where would be the danger of any duel between him and Lord John, if you restored to him your promised faith, and relieved him from the insupportable doubts by which he is now tormented?—Dearest Blanch—before it is too late, reverse your sentence, and resolve upon a full and frank recantation of all that you have threatened!"

A gleam of delight, for a moment, illumi-

nated her countenance at this suggestion ; but quickly subsiding, she mournfully shook her head, saying, with a sigh : “ I must not listen to such counsel ! And yet the temptation !—oh, if you knew how hard it is to resist !—Do not try me so cruelly again, I beseech you, my dearest aunt.—You ask me what has instigated me since last night to determine upon so rigorous a plan ?—It was the cavalier tone of certain expressions in this odious letter from Lord John. To account for his addressing me, he talks in it of his exemption from *personal or family prejudices* ; attributing, very intelligibly to their existence in the mind of Sir Reginald, his resolution to disinherit his nephew should he marry me. This impertinent insinuation opened my eyes most clearly to the necessity of surrendering the hand of Mr. Tremayne, if I meant to preserve him from reproach. I could not endure that it should be universally said, he had sacrificed for me the honour of his family ; forfeited the acquisition of a large property, and alienated the heart of his uncle, to unite himself with

a girl against whom there were such strong *prejudices* to overcome! Had Lady Horatia and Miss Tracy been the only persons acquainted with the real objections made to me, I could have relied upon their delicacy and friendship, and have felt secure, that they would give to them, in the world, the most favourable interpretation: but, when I found that they had already reached Lord John, as circumstances which it required the utmost disdain of public opinion to enable a man to brave,—I gave the matter up. It would be bad enough to be at the mercy of vague conjecture:—to be liable to the malicious comments, sarcasms, and inuendoes of such persons as Lord John and Mr. Tourberville would be more than, either for Mr. Tremayne or myself, I should have courage to support.”

She then entreated that I would go into the usual sitting-room, and ascertain whether his lordship was still in the house, and what was his ostensible motive for coming.

Accordingly I left her, and joined the usual family party; but no Lord John was

visible. He had appeared amongst them, I was told, for about five minutes; but conducted himself with great eccentricity; and, after giving one or two blundering answers to the questions which were asked him, had suddenly decamped, without saying why he went, or why he came. Philippa, especially spoke of his proceedings with great displeasure; my mother only laughed and said, that she had not given him credit for knowing so well how to act the madman; and Miss Tracy enquired anxiously what had become of Horace and Blanch.

I was about to answer her, when seeing Mr. Westcroft ride up to the gate, I abruptly quitted the room, and ran out to meet him.

His first sentence was a relief unspeakable to my apprehensions.

“You may be perfectly easy about your hot-headed young man,” cried he; “his lady mother has found work for him which will keep him out of mischief as effectually as if a whole posse of police officers had been dispatched after him, to seize and bind him over to his good behaviour.”

Blanch now came flying down the gravel-walk, and heard me, with rapture, repeat the information which I had just received. We wished to have conducted our friend to a private room to learn further particulars; but he begged that what he had to say might not be confined to our ears, being much too good to be withheld from those of Lady Stavordale.

"But," objected I, "Miss Tracy and Jane Tourberville are with my mother; and if you have any thing ridiculous to relate of their aunt, it might not appear quite so amusing to *them*, as to the rest of the party "

"Very true," said he; "I am glad you checked me. The folly of Lady Earlsford, which makes it almost impossible to think of her with any thing but contempt, ought not to render one insensible to the feelings of her kindred.—So, lead the way to where I may discourse with you at my ease."

We complied; and he kept us, then, not long in suspense.

"Your note," said he, addressing himself to me, "was put into my hands just as I was on the point of sallying forth for my

usual morning ride. It made some change in my intended route, but rather hastened than retarded my purpose of getting on horseback, and induced me considerably to accelerate the accustomed speed to which I urge my nag. Bovil Court lying in my way to your house, I determined to halt there a moment, in order to learn whether Tremayne, on quitting you had repaired thither, or was to be sought for at East Vale. As I turned in at the gate leading through the grounds up to the house, the object of whom I was in quest instantly met my view. But instead of speaking to him, I was glad to range myself out of his way as expeditiously as possible. He was mounted upon a vigorous young hunter, which seemed to cut through the air with the fleetness of an arrow. As he passed me I halloo'd, hoping to catch his notice, and prevail upon him to relax his speed. The effort was vain ; like the Spectre Rider in Burgher's *Leonora*, he raised such a clatter, that

‘ Dust, stones, and sparks in whirlwind rose,

‘ And horse and horseman pant for breath.’

“The fact is, he disappeared almost as soon as he came in sight; and I verily believe, did not even perceive me. Well knowing that my sober steed could never cope with such frantic swiftness, I was, though extremely disappointed, about to repass the gate, when I heard myself called by some person who was running furiously after me. I rode back to know what was the matter; and then found, that I was pursued by Wilson, Mr. Tremayne’s valet. “Sir,” cried he, straining his voice to be heard whilst still at a considerable distance, “did you see my master?—Has he been gone past too long for me to overtake him?”

“Overtake him, my good fellow?—You might as well hope to overtake the wind!—He is going at the rate of a Newmarket racer!—Where the deuce is he flying with such mad haste?”

“He is off for London, sir, I believe; and he has left his purse and pocket-book behind him, and to the best of my knowledge, he has not a shilling about him.”

“Oh, never mind; he will easily find

means to get a fresh supply of shillings ! But what has taken him to London so suddenly ?”

“ Sir, I fancy he is gone in pursuit of my lady ?”

“ Your lady ?”—interrupted I.

“ Yes, Sir ; she left the court this morning at five o’clock, and took only her maid with her, and did not tell any body where she was going, or when she would be back. And when my master, who slept at East Vale, came here about a quarter of an hour ago, the house-keeper gave him a letter which she said her lady had left for him, with orders not to send it to his uncle’s, but to keep it till she saw him, and could put it into his hands herself. Well, Sir, my poor master read the letter, and was like a man distracted ! He called for the swiftest horse that could be found : flew himself to the stables to hurry the men who were saddling one for him that he had lately persuaded my lady to buy for his brother : spoke nothing but broken sentences to any body ; and never stood in one spot for half a second at a time. I was just come over from East Vale with some of his things ; he having told me when he got up, that he should not at present, stay at his

uncle's any longer. Hearing of the strange way he was in, I thought I might as well invent some pretence for going to him. So I followed him to the stables with his hat and gloves, and began asking him for his orders about a box of books he expected from town: but, Lord, sir! he never heard me. All he seemed to think of was the horse; and the very moment the creature was led out, he sprang upon his back, and was off like a shot. We all stared after him with amazement; and presently, one of the maids brought me his purse and pocket-book, which she had found upon a table in the room where he had read my lady's letter. I suppose he took them out to see what money he had ready for his journey, and then, in his eagerness to look after the horse, threw them down, and thought no more about them."

"And this is all that you know of the affair? What, then, leads you to suppose, Wilson, that your master has taken the road to London?"

"Why, Sir, they all seem to think so up at the house. They say, that my lady is in

love with young Mr. Villiers, and that she is gone to London to be married to him, and—”

Here an abrupt and incredulous exclamation escaped at the same moment both from Blanch and myself.

“Lady Earlsford married to Mr. Villiers! Impossible! How could you bear, Mr. Westcroft, to hear the man assert any thing so preposterous?”

“Its preposterousness,” resumed he a little drily, “did not strike me quite so forcibly as it may do you! At all events, I thought the hint not wholly unworthy attention; putting spurs to my horse, therefore, I rode to Atherton, to gain from Mrs. Talbot whatever information she might be able or willing to give me. On *one* point, I obtained considerable satisfaction by the measure: I convinced myself that no species of collusion existed between her and her nephew. She frankly replied, in answer to my enquiries respecting him, that he had, in a very precipitate and unexpected manner left her house the preceding evening, without giving her any clue by which she could ascertain the route he had taken.

“ I asked her whether she was wholly without suspicion of the motive that might have actuated him to adopt so sudden a resolution? She acknowledged that he had given her but too much reason to fear he was involved in pecuniary difficulties which required some safer place of confinement than, of late, Atherton had proved. His visit to her, she now felt assured, had originally been paid with no other view than to escape from his London creditors; and, subsequently, had been made subservient to the purpose of obtaining from her loans of money. What were the sums advanced, she neither specified, nor did I enquire: but, that they were, however considerable, inadequate to his wants, there was very just ground for believing; since the fact was, that during the latter period of his abode with her, he seemed to live in continual dread of being beset by bailiffs, and never stirred from the house without submitting to the previous precaution of sending forth a scout to ascertain whether the ways were clear. She very naturally, therefore, concluded, that feeling convinced, since his place of residence was

so well known, that it was vain to trust to it any longer for security, he had determined upon an abrupt and unanticipated flight in search of some more secure asylum. I now communicated to her," proceeded Mr. Westcroft, "the extraordinary disappearance of Lady Earlsford; the conjectures afloat amongst her servants; and the mysterious celerity of her son's movements after the perusal of the letter which she had left for him. Great and unaffected was the consternation with which Mrs. Talbot heard me: I will not say that there was *surprise* in her countenance: but there was the most marked and honest regret. She told me, when recovered from her first shock, that from sundry indications, palpable to her during her recent intimacy at Bovil Court, she had been induced to suspect Lady Earlsford of a growing inclination for Villiers, which had often given her extreme disquiet. In *her* presence, however, nothing had ever been said that could justify her interference with unsolicited advice. She had, indeed, endeavoured to sound the young man's thoughts upon the subject: but she was grieved to

say, that his manner of treating it, though, at the time, it somewhat reassured her, contributed very much *now*, to add to her concern. He had uniformly spoken of the Viscountess with a levity and disrespect which seemed utterly incompatible with any design either upon her hand or heart. What, then, should she really mean to connect herself with him, were the poor woman's prospects? He had been at Bovil Court, Mrs. Talbot added, several hours the preceding day; and if there is any thing preconcerted in their measures, it must have been during that interview that their arrangements were made. This," concluded Mr. Westcroft, "is all that I am authorized to state with certainty, concerning these strange transactions. My individual opinion is, that the mad Peeress is gone to join her intended husband—alias, bane: but I have no further grounds for saying so than my own belief and Mrs. Talbot's fears." 1800

Blanch, sorrowing for her as the mother of Tremayne; and I, lamenting her folly as disgraceful to her age and sex; both suffered our friend to terminate his recital without

making upon it the slightest comment. He probably read our feelings in our looks ; for, dropping the subject, he presently said, “ Out of evil, you know, it is an established expectation, that, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, good is to arise. So in the present case, this harum-scarum journey of Tremayne’s, whatever may be its cause, is likely to save him from the danger of taking one yet more disagreeable, by favour of a passport from Lord John Alcester.” Blanch shuddered and turned pale. “ Not that I mean to say,” continued Mr. Westcroft, “ that *all* the risk would have been Tremayne’s ; on these occasions, nothing can be more reciprocal than is usually the chance of evil. Lord John, therefore, might have been the discomfited, instead of the discomfiter : but I hold it sovereignly absurd in a man of sense to put his life in jeopardy from a fool ! Mirabeau, on receiving a challenge from some petty country gentleman, who had taken offence at one of his speeches, frankly replied, ‘ *Il n’est pas juste que j’expose un homme d’esprit comme moi, contre un sot comme lui.*’ And this answer, Madame de Stael tells us,

drew upon him, even in France, no imputation of poltroonery. Its truth was felt; and so it would in all similar cases, if there were but wisdom enough amongst the wise to prefer the reputation of intellectual superiority, to that of mere animal courage. What *could* make Tremayne so silly as to dream of offering himself as a mark for Lord John to shoot at? Better hang up for him such a *popinjay* to take aim at, as has been so well celebrated in the ‘Tales of my Landlord’ ”

Neither Blanch nor I were much inclined to satisfy his curiosity; and fortunately, just then, a note was delivered to me from Lady Horatia, and served as a sufficient excuse for not answering him. After running it over to myself, I read it aloud. It was in these words:—

“The alarm into which I was thrown, my dear Miss Stavordale, by the scarcely-legible lines you sent me, has, within these five minutes, been superseded by tidings of so extraordinary a nature, brought hither by my nephew’s servant, that every other feeling is absorbed in astonishment. I can, at

this moment, give you no particulars. This only have *I* time to say, or will *you* have much anxiety to hear:—all danger of an encounter between Horace and Lord John, is, for the present, at an end.

“Yours, most truly,

“HORATIA TRACY.”

“How clearly does this note demonstrate,” said Mr. Westcroft, “the value of two evils in preference to one. Here is Lady Horatia, like our fair Blanch, not only reconciled to the absence of Tremayne, but rejoicing at any circumstance that keeps him out of the way of his musical adversary. Whereas, but for this fighting project of his, their tender pity for the fatigue to which he is exposing himself, and their grief at being parted from him, would have melted hearts of stone! Oh, ever whilst you live, pray that misfortunes may come in pairs, ‘*like Juno’s swans, still coupled and inseparable*’.”

Perceiving that it was difficult to draw a smile from me—impossible to win one from my companion—he soon after left us, and went to pay his compliments to my mother and the other ladies. Blanch, to shield her-

self from observation, and to escape all associates, stole out by a backway, to take a ramble in the least frequented part of the grounds.

It seems to be my fate, to have the painful office allotted me, of announcing to my father and mother every unpleasant piece of news which it is necessary that they should be made acquainted with. I yesterday, after dinner, communicated to them the desperate appearance which the affairs of Blanch and Mr. Tremayne at this moment exhibit. They are both, though from different motives, highly incensed. My father resents the insulting retraction from his given word, of Sir Reginald Tourberville ;—he calls it a display of arrogant superiority, extremely offensive to our family, and little short in itself of being absolutely dishonourable. I have scarcely ever seen him so deeply and bitterly irritated. My mother's anger is principally directed against Blanch. She is outrageous at the repulse given to Tremayne's

generous supplications ; the scruples assigned for it, she treats as exaltations of fantastic refinement, originating in self-sufficiency, perverseness, and total insensibility of heart ! “ But I always feared,” continued she, “ that Tremayne had bestowed his invaluable affection upon a creature incapable of appreciating the blessing. Slow, scrutinizing, fastidious, she knows no spontaneous feeling, no impulsive kindness ! She is all snow ;—I will not call her all flint—for, from a flint you may elicit sparks—from her—nothing !”

I spoke with all the energy I dared in her defence ; dwelling more especially upon the tenderness which she had shewn for Mr. Tremayne’s interest, and the horror with which she shrunk from becoming the cause of family feuds, and interminable divisions. But I might with equal success have addressed myself to the winds. My mother was not to be convinced or appeased ; and her resentment (though a whole day has passed since this conversation) still endures. She will neither look at nor speak to Blanch ; and nothing, I am persuaded, saves the sorrowing girl from yet harsher treatment, but

the secret approbation which, in despite of herself, my mother bestows upon her prompt and spirited rejection of Lord John. This, though she does not own it, I can plainly see, is a regale to her imagination the most delightful. She considers it not only as a merited chastisement of his lordship's vanity, and unauthorized confidence, but as an atonement to the injured Tremayne, at which she mentally triumphs. The delusion in which we have all been involved respecting the object of Lord John's frequent visits, enhances her gratification. "Surely," she cried, "Philippa must become aware at last, that she is but warring against destiny when she labours so assiduously to win by adulation the homage which refuses itself to the influence of her genuine attractions! At one and the same time, here are two of her intended captives—Lord John Alcester and Maurice Villiers—self-extricated from her toils; and the next who deserts her luckless banner, will probably be Mr. Elsmere. Strange, that ambition should thus '*o'erleap itself*,' and defeat its dearest object by its own eagerness!"

I have had too much policy, however, to give Philippa any intimation of Lord John's letter. She needs no new stimulus to dislike her young kinswoman; and at such a time, I am more than ever solicitous to preserve the depressed Blanch from annoying speeches and splenetic looks.

Meanwhile, Lord John, though he has not again called here, we have reason to know is still at East Vale. Blanch has received a second epistle from him. Its language is more respectful than that of the former, and more expressive of real attachment. He deprecates, in the humblest terms, her anger at the premature urgency of his application; acknowledges the indelicacy of such a mode of conduct; but solemnly disclaims the egregious conceit of ever having aspired to an *immediate* acceptance. He implores her not to prohibit, so arbitrarily, his cherishing a faint and distant hope of being hereafter less rigorously treated; assures her, that he will endeavour to submit to her present negative without a murmur, if he may but flatter himself that he is not rejected *for ever*.

This letter, Blanch, languid and spiritless,

though unwavering in her purpose, besought me to answer. I did so ; and I hope did it temperately, and with good manners. I chose expressions, however, too forcible to leave him in any doubt as to her unalterable determination to decline his addresses. I hope that this will close the correspondence.

Lord Earlsford and Mr. Lloyd arrived at Bovil Court last night, and both came here this morning. They appear totally unsuspecting of the motive attributed to the Viscountess for leaving home. Mr. Lloyd, probably, is not much grieved to be spared the necessity of an immediate interview with her ; and his pupil spoke of her absence with perfect resignation. They had seen Sir Reginald and Mr. Tourberville ; and to judge by the casual expressions which fell from them, Mr. Lloyd had no reason to be dissatisfied with his reception from either. The meeting between Jane and her lover, I did not witness ; indeed, we none of us were present at it, my mother considerably devising measures to enable them to hold their first conference without observers. Except Martha, and, perhaps, Philippa, no one

under this roof is now sufficiently at ease to take any interest in Jane's smiles, or Jane's blushes. For myself, I am glad the poor thing is happy, and likely to obtain a respectable protector; but when I have said that, I have expressed the utmost that I am capable of feeling about her. She is, since the departure of her aunt, our permanent guest.

Clavering has just brought me a very singular report, which, she says, is current throughout the neighbourhood, and yet can be traced to no authentic source. A belief, it seems, is entertained, that my brother has entirely renounced the project of establishing himself in the Crimea; that he has lately married a lady of large fortune, and is on the point of returning to England. She first heard the strange intelligence in the village, at what is called *The Shop*; and afterwards, it was repeated to her at the miller's; then by the schoolmistress; and finally, by the wife of the blacksmith. Each informant gave the authority of half a dozen others for

his or her assertion : but all seemed to be in equal ignorance as to the precise individual with whom the rumour originated. One third of this village gossip neither my mother nor I have any hesitation in believing ; I mean that part of it which relates to George's change of purpose respecting the journey to the Crimea. He never was remarkable for stability of plans ; and such a one as this, fraught with so few pleasurable inducements, and with so many discomforts, difficulties, and fatigues, was the least likely of any that ever entered his imagination, to be finally put into execution. But the rich wife, and the speedy return to England, we cannot quite so easily persuade ourselves to credit. Women of large fortune seldom become the prize of needy men of five and forty. George has indisputably been handsome ; whether he is so now may, not unreasonably (the late hours and irregular habits of his life considered), be doubted. At all events, he is too little studious of his own interest, to be skilled in the art of laying siege to wealthy heiresses and jointured widows. I could much sooner believe, if he is married again, that his choice

has, a second time, fallen upon some beautiful creature as indigent as himself, than that any motive of expediency could have impelled him to take the trouble necessary to secure a wealthy bride. The propagators of this tale, however, all seem, Clavering tells us, to delight in the idea of its being incontestibly true in every point. They have never, they acknowledge, seen the 'squire; but they have always heard, that he was a fine, open-handed, easy-tempered gentleman; and they wish for nothing better than to have him, with plenty of money, settled with the good Baronet, his father, in their neighbourhood. —So much for the disinterestedness of rustic attachment.

This is the fourth day of Mr. Tremayne's absence, and Lady Horatia, who was here this morning, grows extremely impatient for some tidings of him. In the interim, we have, at least, the consolation of knowing that he was seen on the road in apparent health, and that, long ere this, if London

was his destination, he must have reached the end of his journey. Lord Glenmorne is come back, and tells us, that when about ten miles from town, he passed the rapid traveller; but had so little expectation of meeting him, that the surprise into which he was thrown bereft him of all power to speak to him. Indeed, it would not, by his lordship's account, have been an easy object to effect, even had he been prepared for the interview; for Mr. Tremayne was pursuing his career with a swiftness that seemed to defy all hindrance, and to forbid all interruption.

Miss Tracy, in compliment to Lord Glenmorne, goes back to East Vale this evening. She openly avows her dislike of that residence, and expresses the strongest desire to prevail upon her mother to abridge the period of her intended visit there, and to return into Hampshire immediately. This, Lady Horatia says, is quite impracticable: the Baronet wants her society now more than ever: "And, my dear Helen," she added, "I want more than ever, to be within reach of assisting poor Horace, if possible, through some of his various perplexities. Miss Stavordale

tells me, that his unmanageable young mistress has, in direct terms, insisted upon dissolving the engagement into which she had entered with him ; and —”

“ Oh, now then,” interrupted Miss Tracy, “ her conduct towards me during these last three or four days is accounted for !—The guilty thing avoids me to escape being questioned on the subject of her evident unhappiness ; for she well knows what a torrent of reproaches I should have poured upon her, had I succeeded in bringing her to confession.—An abominable little apostate !—What does she mean by such tergiversation ? —Is she doing all this to humour the pride and caprice of Sir Reginald ? or the malice of Mr. Tourberville ?—I really did not think she could have been so weak !”

“ Weak you certainly would not call her,” resumed Lady Horatia, “ had you heard the arguments which, Miss Stavordale informs me, she used in her defence. They may manifest inexperience ; some degree of exaltation ; and a jealousy on the subject of her mother, that makes her writhe with too much sensitiveness under every attack upon

her fame; but they certainly denote admirable command over her own passions, and a solicitude for the honour of the man she loves, the most generous. That she suffers by her noble endeavour to do what she thinks right, adds to her merit; and we, my dear Helen, who so truly value Horace, and therefore ought to exult in the proved worth of the lovely young creature to whom he has dedicated his heart, should be the last to treat the heroic sacrifice with severity."

Miss Tracy was considerably mollified by this speech; and, perhaps, had my mother heard it, she might have been softened likewise. I grieve to say, that she continues to evince as much displeasure against Blanch as ever. Her repulsive coldness is submitted to, with the humblest patience: but it is deeply felt; and, added to other motives for sorrow, causes the poor girl, as her eyes betray, to shed in private many a bitter tear. How changed, within these few days, are her circumstances!—She who, but so short a time since, was the principal object of attention to nearly the whole family; who was never looked at but with an approving smile, ne-

ver spoken to but with endearment, is now a neglected—I might almost say, an insulated member of the establishment. She wanders about the house and grounds, looking subdued and wretched; sits silent and unnoticed at our meals, except when spoken to by my father or me; and if she attempts to answer us, does it with a heart so full, that it is with difficulty she can articulate a distinct syllable. Her colour, her appetite, her activity, are all gone with her happiness; and I think, that even Mr. Tremayne, indignant and offended as he is, were he to witness her present fallen state, would commiserate and forgive her.

Lady Horatia was right yesterday, when she ventured to predict, that another sun would not set, without bringing her intelligence of her nephew. She has just sent me a letter from him, written in haste, and dated from an hotel in London. I had no time to transcribe it, as Lord Glenmorne, who was its bearer, waited whilst I read it :

but these, as well as I can recollect, are its contents :

Uncertain to what extent the motive of his journey has become known, he entreats Lady Horatia to forgive his avoiding to speak of it explicitly, even to her. He begs that she will write to him ; and urges her to acquaint him unequivocally with the nature, whatever they may be, of the conjectures prevalent on the subject throughout the neighbourhood. As a relief to her own friendly feelings, he assures her, that the business in which he is engaged, will, he has reason to think, terminate satisfactorily. He then apologizes for troubling her to direct his servant to follow him ; and ends his cautious epistle with only one brief paragraph allusive to Blanch : but that is not of a neutral character, most certainly !

“ Have you been made acquainted,” he enquires, “ with the cruel scene which passed at Hazleford the very hour before my departure?—Tell her to whom I am indebted for so much suffering, that she excels all others in the art of giving pain!—That what I have endured since, though of a nature to wound my very soul, has fallen short, indeed, of

the pang, which she, with so skilful a hand, succeeded in inflicting."

Poor Tremayne! With what bitterness is this sentence written.—I would not for the world it should have met my mother's eye. —It would have armed her with fresh weapons against her disgraced grandchild; for, such is her predilection in favour of Horace, that were she to hear of his repinings, she would scarcely think any severity too great to exercise upon their author.

I wrote a few lines to Lady Horatia, thanking her for the sight of Mr. Tremayne's letter, and very earnestly requesting, that in her answer she would solemnly assure him, that the suspicions with which he quitted Hazleford are totally without foundation: and I added, "Vouchsafe, also, dear madam, you that so well know how, to set before Mr. Tremayne some of those benevolent arguments in favour of the purity of Blanch's motives, which you yesterday so eloquently brought forward in the presence of Miss Tracy."

I have no doubt that my petition will be complied with; and from Tremayne's habi-

tual respect for the opinions of Lady Horatia, I am not without a hope, that her gentle and judicious mediation may effect much good.

We are all thrown into amazement!—George *is* in England ; George *is* married again!—A letter, dated Dover, has arrived within this hour, in which he informs us of his landing ; but in terms which seem to imply, that some previous notice of his design must have reached us, and fully prepared us for the news. He speaks of “ his wife,” as of a person we are all bound to know a great deal about, and are naturally all extremely desirous to greet. He, or rather *they*, mean to be with us as soon after the receipt of his letter, as the business which they have to transact in London will possibly permit.

It is plain, that some previous dispatch from him has been lost. Yet, how strange that the intelligence of his impending arrival which *we* failed to receive, should so accurately, to all appearance, have reached the

ears of others. Still, the imputed *wealth* of the bride is merely hypothetical. My brother says nothing in confirmation of that part of the report. Its chief claim to credit (and that I allow to be a pretty strong one) rests upon our conviction, since many of his debts still remain unpaid, that he would not have ventured to shew himself in London, had he not been conscious, that he has the means of appeasing any impertinent creditor gifted with too tenacious a memory.

We are all differently affected by this unlooked-for event. Blanch seems revived by the thoughts of again beholding her father, and hopes much from his ability to efface all stain from the character of her mother : yet, I can plainly see, that she is hurt at his marrying again so soon ; and when she heard his letter read, the repeated mention of “ his wife ” evidently gave her pain. She forbore, however, to express her feelings ; recollecting, probably, the censure cast upon her mother for a similar transaction, and secretly acknowledging, from her own experience, how natural, if not how just, was Sir Reginald’s indignation at the haste with which

Aurelia, after the death of his son, had bestowed her hand upon my brother.

My mother's early affection for George, has, in a great degree, been weaned by his long absence and previous indiscretions:—the irremediable necessity of selling Meadthorpe, to which he reduced my father, still rankles at her heart: and the thousand disadvantages to which she thinks that our diminished income (diminished through George's prodigality) has subjected her daughters, have made an impression upon her mind highly detrimental to the revival of her maternal partiality. But, notwithstanding, she is sufficiently well pleased with the prospect of seeing him, to speak of it with perfect good-humour. She is forming a variety of ridiculous conjectures respecting her new daughter-in-law: surmising, one minute, that she is the widow of an Eastern Nabob, and will appear amongst us scented with attar of roses, covered with shawls, and attended by an awful train of black servants; one to carry her pocket-handkerchief; another to hold her smelling-bottle; and a third to bid a fourth tell a fifth, that their mistress wants an addi-

tional sofa-pillow. "Or, perhaps," she continued, "this exotic bride, whom George, I suppose, picked up in France, may be the illustrious daughter of one of Buonaparte's ex-kings; in which case, we may fairly flatter ourselves, that although somewhat 'fallen from her high estate,' sufficient wrecks may still remain of her papa's plundered wealth, to constitute a very pretty fortune for a broken-down English spendthrift."

My father, without aiming to be so jocose, is content to express, in plain, warm terms, the pleasure he feels at the restoration to his family and friends, of a son, who, whatever might be his faults, never offended him by personal disrespect, and never forfeited his regard by flagrant depravity.

Philippa's sentiments on the occasion still appear to be held in suspense. If the wife is a woman of fashion and property, it will be all very well; if she is a nameless upstart, adieu to every chance of cordiality, or even of common good-will. She professes to have retained so little remembrance of George, that it is not merely his being *her brother* that can make her love the woman he has

chosen: she must possess some strong personal recommendations to win her way to the hearts of his sisters: "Or else, *I* at least," concluded Philippa, "desire to have nothing to say to her."

Martha hopes her new kinswoman is good-natured, young, and fond of dancing; and that she has brought over with her a great many fashionable patterns. Jane Tourberville seems to have adopted the same wish; for she has just declared, that she will have no more dresses made up for her marriage, till she sees how Mrs. Stavordale's foreign clothes are cut out. Martha's influence does her no good;—particularly when Mr. Lloyd remits his visits, which is the case at present, on account of some business connected with his living, which has carried him for a few days from home.

A very serious disaster, I fear, has occurred in our house. Clavering can nowhere find the written acknowledgment which she asked for, and obtained, from the gentleman to

whom she delivered my brother's packet. The prospect of George's immediate return brought this document to the good woman's recollection ; and yesterday evening, being alone in the housekeeper's room, she opened the old-fashioned bureau in which she deposits all her papers of any consequence, in order to satisfy herself that the one in question was safe. She saw it, just where she expected to see it, in one of the pigeon-holes by itself ; and, fully convinced of its security, closed the bureau, and was going to lock it, when she heard herself called by one of the young ladies. In her haste to obey the summons, she did not stay to take out the key, but ran to know what was wanted. Various causes, afterwards, contributed to delay her return into her own territories, and it was not till nearly an hour had elapsed that she was once more mistress of her time, and able to bestow a thought upon the fatal key. She then drew it out, but without having an idea of looking again for the paper ; and, soon after, went to bed in perfect composure of mind. This morning, however, having occasion to search for some bill which she was going to

pay, a vacancy in the pigeon-hole suddenly struck her;—and, to shorten the story, she became convinced, after a long and fruitless examination, that the memorandum had been conveyed away. Neither she, nor the other servants, are aware that any body went into the room during her absence: but certainly, as she says, “ ‘The paper could not go without hands.’ ” Her suspicions point to no one in the house; nor, to say the truth, do mine. It seems more rational to conclude, that some ill-designing person from *without*, has had the sole dishonour of this deed. The room is on the ground-floor; the window-shutters were not closed; and there is a half-glazed door, seldom fastened till late at night, which leads, by a short gravel-walk, to the back-gate through which persons coming to the offices usually approach the house. Is it not probable, that Clavering had been seen whilst examining the bureau, and that her observer, taking advantage of her quitting the room, entered it secretly, and availed himself of the light which she left burning upon the table, to single out and appropriate the paper which is missing:—I firmly

believe, that the real author of this exploit is Signor Antonio. Clavering has seen very little of him lately, and he has scrupulously avoided any renewal of his former interrogations. But we have no reason, therefore, to imagine, that he had so entirely abandoned his early purpose, as to hesitate in seizing a favourable opportunity to put it in execution.

I have recommended, and Clavering has obeyed the injunction, her writing instantly to the lawyer, Mr. Thorpe, who gave her the acknowledgment, acquainting him with the circumstance of her having been fraudulently dispossessed of it; and cautioning him to give no credit to the authority of any one, who, without a written order from her master (lately returned to England), should venture to apply for the packet which she placed in his custody.

In addition to this, I have despatched a note to Miss Tracy, begging her to employ her maid to find out whether Antonio was absent from East Vale yesterday evening between the hours of eight and nine.—I refer

her for the reason of my making this enquiry to our next personal interview.

* * * * *

An answer is just brought to me from Miss Tracy :—

“ MY DEAR MISS STAVORDALE,

“ Antonio is a mysterious sort of personage, whose movements can seldom be accurately traced. He was not *seen* last night either to go out, or to come in ; and at supper, my maid heard him say, that he had been reading in his own room the whole evening, a *ver' prit bouk*, called *Boccacio*. At an extremely early hour this morning, he set forth on a journey : but no one knows whither, or for what purpose.—Can I do any thing to prove my readiness to serve you ?—Pray employ me, or authorize me to employ whoever else you please, if there is the least opening for making me or others of use.

“ Perhaps you have not yet heard that

Lord John Alcester went away yesterday morning. Elsmere remains here another week, and means, if you do not forbid it, to accompany Lord Glenmorne and myself to Hazleford this evening.

“ Yours, my dear Miss Stavordale,

“ Very affectionately,

“ HELEN TRACY.”

This man's sudden disappearance troubles me. Should he apply for the packet immediately on his arrival in town, (and that such is the object of his journey can scarcely be questioned) it is more than probable that Clavering's warning letter will not have reached Mr. Thorpe, and the papers may be surrendered without a suspicion of unfair dealing. What more, however, can be done? I will apply for counsel to Mr. Westcroft. My father and mother agree with me in thinking, that some vigorous measure ought to be resorted to, but cannot, any more than myself, decide exactly what would be best; or rather, what would be most practicable. I should like, could my liking avail, to have the man stopped and searched, on his return,

before he can have any communication with his master. In a case which may be of so much moment to George, the apprehension of giving offence to the Tourbervilles ought to be wholly disregarded.

This tormenting affair of the packet (I begin to be sick of the very word) was talked over last night in full counsel. Miss Tracy, and Lord Glenmorne, in addition to Mr. Westcroft, were called to the conference; and after hearing Clavering's deposition, (including a recapitulation of all that had passed at their several interviews, between her and Antonio, on the subject of the papers,) were unanimously of opinion, that when the man comes back, he ought not to be allowed to have access to his master, till a very thorough examination has taken place of the effects upon his person. Mr. Westcroft undertakes to appoint proper people to watch all the avenues to East Vale, and when the supposed culprit approaches, to arrest him without noise or clamour, and convey him, for full investigation, to the nearest public-house.

“But is there no danger,” said Miss Tracy, “that before he gets there, his fears may induce him privately to throw the packet away?”

“I perceive,” said Mr. Westcroft, “that you have very pretty talents for practising as a thief-taker! At the next promotion in Bow-street, I cannot do better, in justice to the public, than recommend you. However, as to the danger you speak of, and which I allow to be by no means chimerical, it must be provided against by stationing men to way-lay the Signor, who have *heads* as well as *arms*; worthy wights, like Dogberry and Verges, who shall be proud of their office; and moreover, shall come to you, if you please, for their final instructions.”

“With all my heart; and stupid indeed must they be, if I do not succeed in impressing them with a due conviction of the necessity of vigilance, to avoid being outwitted by their crafty prisoner.”

My father now requested, that every thing that was done should be in *his* name. “I wish to be considered,” said he, “as acting in this affair in behalf of my son; and should

it hereafter be urged, that the man has been falsely suspected, and wrongfully detained, it is fit that we, and we alone, should abide the consequences."

"Very true, Sir Geoffrey," cried Miss Tracy: "but believe me, those consequences will not be very formidable. Since I wrote to Miss Stavordale in the morning, my maid, who delights in the employment, has ascertained, by further enquiries, that two of the out-of-door servants at East Vale, saw Antonio, about the time mentioned, returning to the house by a back way, and looking, they said, though without the least suspicion that they spoke the truth, as if he was stealing home after having been '*about no good.*' These were the men's own words; and, in my opinion, they are a strong corroboration of our worst surmises."

Mr. Westcroft again complimented her upon her legal sagacity; but at the same time begged that she would obtain for him the names of these two persons, whose evidence, it was very possible, might be of some use.

Sir Reginald, of course, is to know nothing of what is in meditation. Lady Horatia,

we gave Miss Tracy full liberty to inform of the whole affair. Her sense of justice is so strictly impartial, that were she much more nearly connected with Mr. Tourberville than is really the case, she would be the first to wish for a thorough investigation of the reasonableness of our doubts.

I learned from Miss Tracy, that the Baronet, now, never voluntarily mentions any of our family; and, as if fearful, above all, of whatever might keep alive the remembrance of Blanch, has had every vestige that remains of her short abode under his roof, removed from his sight. The little table at which she used to draw or work in the saloon, is again consigned to the obscurity from whence it was brought for her accommodation; no Italian books are allowed to be about; no music is suffered; even her favourite plants are discarded from their stands; and a lively white terrier, belonging to one of the upper domestics, which she was often permitted to entice into the drawing-room, is now rigorously banished. These are all proofs, Miss Tracy says, that she lives in his memory; that she haunts his ima-

gination; and still, in despite of himself, retains her hold upon his heart. I have very little doubt that he still loves her; the power which she had unconsciously gained over him was astonishing: but what will this love do for her? What did his attachment to his eldest son effect for that unfortunate young man? Besides, this deliberate dismissal of every thing that might perpetuate her memory, is no more than he practised on the death of Mrs. Charles Tourberville, whom he certainly, and implacably, disliked. All the ornaments, all the appropriate pieces of furniture, which *she* had chosen or valued, were ordered away as imperiously as every memento of Blanch is now.

We are still held in painful suspense. My brother, who might best explain the nature and importance of the papers, is not yet arrived, and we are totally at a loss in what part of London to direct to him. Antonio, likewise, continues absent; and we have no answer from Mr. Thorpe. In the

midst of these sources of disquietude, the confidence reposed in me by Lady Horatia, offers me almost the only compensation which, at this time, could be gratifying to my feelings. Accompanied with an entreaty not to make it public in the family, she has sent me the following letter; permitting me, however, to shew it to Blanch, if she will promise, when Horace comes back, *to be good!*

“ You, who love so much to give pleasure, dearest Lady Horatia, ought not, by any voluntary delay, to be deprived a moment of the gratification of knowing how much the letter I have just received from you, has contributed to sooth and re-assure me. Your vindication of Blanch, if it has not restored me to happiness, has at least subdued the irritation of my spirits; re-animated my confidence in her love, though it has not abated my dread of her perseverance in renouncing me. You say that I ‘ought not to judge of *her* mind—girl as she is—by the common standard applicable to her age and sex.’ True, oh, how true!—you further tell me—and what can be stronger?

that though doubtful whether, at her age, you could have acted as she has done; yet, to *have* so acted, had you seen the case as she does, would, throughout life, have exalted you in your own esteem! Ah, repeat not such words in her hearing!—They may be the result of conviction; but they would operate powerfully in my disfavour, and she requires not, Heaven knows, any fresh incitement to pursue the stern system of fortitude which you so much extol. I treasure, however, every sentence in her praise, proceeding from your pen, with enthusiastic delight. Yours are not the effusions of politic admiration, secretly triumphing in my disappointment; you participate in none of my uncle's prejudices; and I not only implicitly confide in your assurances of friendliness to my cause, but most warmly thank you even for the singular expression with which you sum up your remarks on the affair:—‘After all,’ you observe, ‘though I am the advocate of Blanch, as far as her conscientious intentions go, I do not mean to blame *you*:—the fact is—you are *both right*!’ It not this written a little in the

spirit of Sir Roger de Coverly's temporizing—' *There is much to be said on both sides?*' Fervently do I hope, however, if the balance now remains so evenly suspended between us, that ere long the scale of error may preponderate on the side of Blanch! I have no ambition to be forced, at my own expence, to admire such sublimity of conduct; it would be quite sufficient for me to love her, and to owe my happiness to her relenting affection.

"Lord John Alcester, you assure me, is on the point of quitting East Vale, and ought never to have excited in me the slightest uneasiness. I thought otherwise; I now see that I was designedly, though indirectly, *trained* into thinking otherwise! for what purpose, I am unwilling to ask myself; but certain it is, that Tourberville employed every means, short of positive assertion, to convince me of Lord John's increasing, though, *he supposed*, hopeless attachment. Sarcasms, mock remonstrances, and a thousand 'ambiguous givings out,' addressed to him, even in my presence, were perpetually resorted to. I could not, or I would not,

believe so ill of Lord John as to take serious alarm at his pretended passion, till Blanch maddened me to jealous fury during our last memorable conference at Hazleford. Yet, even whilst pouring reproaches and accusations upon her, I half doubted their justice; but a blush — still unexplained — put the finishing stroke to my phrenzy. Oh, that blush! how has it incessantly harassed my imagination! Bright and beautiful as it was, never may I behold one of so doubtful a character upon her face again. Ask her, dear Lady Horatia, what that extraordinary suffusion betokened? To me, influenced, I suppose, by the opinion, that—

‘ Chi s’arossisce, e tace
Si spiega assai,’

it was portentous of every thing my soul most shuddered at, and dreaded.

“Your account of the rumours in circulation respecting my mother’s unadvised journey, shock me extremely. They border, alas, too nearly upon the truth. Yet, as the danger of evil which I flew hither to prevent is, I am most happy to say, *entirely at an*

end, I am sanguine in hoping, that all such reports will speedily die away and be forgotten. Aided by the ready and active co-operation of his brother, I have succeeded in procuring for Villiers a commission in the East India service ; we have paid some of the most pressing of his debts, and fitted him out as well as we could afford, for his new profession. He sails with the first outward-bound fleet. My mother is gone to Cheltenham.

“ These arrangements, you will easily believe, were not completed with quite so much facility and dispatch as they are now detailed. The truth is, that in various ways, I have been severely tried. My journey to town, a considerable part of which was performed, for greater expedition, on horseback, nearly knocked me up : and the difficulties which I had to contend with after I arrived ; the studied impediments thrown in my way ; the reluctance to admit my interference ; the endless repetition of stale arguments necessary, not to *produce*, but to *renew* conviction in a mind unwilling to *be* convinced, were so exhausting to my spirits, and so in-

cessant in their demands upon my forbearance, that nothing but a deliberate previous resolution to sacrifice every thing—time, health, rest, and strength, to the accomplishment of my purpose, could have supplied me with energy for the contest.—Upon the whole, I am now of opinion, that the continual succession of arduous employment to which I was imperiously impelled, was, just at that juncture, rather a blessing than an evil. What should I have done in a state of inactivity, whilst my heart, my temper, my nerves, were all in so disordered a condition?—I was half insane when I quitted Blanch; and had I not been called upon to act for others, should, in all probability, have devised some frantic exploit for myself, the temptation to which I am truly thankful to have been removed from.

“ Two extraordinary pieces of information have been communicated to me this morning;—the first is, that news had reached town of the death of Tourberville.—Your silence on the subject satisfied me at once, that no credit was to be attached to the report; and a very curious circumstance,

which I will relate when we meet, occurred in consequence of my representation of its fallacy. The other wonder was announced to me by Wilson, and is no less than a positive assertion, that Mr. Stavordale, the father of Blanch, is actually in England: ‘In England,’ as Wilson expresses it, ‘for good, Sir;—he is married to a lady of fine fortune, and able to shew his face with the best of them!’—And a very excellent face it is, I dare say; and one which I shall be pre-eminently rejoiced to see!—So hopeless are my prospects from Blanch’s own decision, that they cannot but be amended by the interference of any other umpire;—and I will lay such close siege to Mr. Stavordale’s favour; I will so unremittingly assail him with supplications and importunities, that he ‘shall not rest between the elements of air and earth, but he shall pity me!’

“Farewell, my ever-indulgent and dear Lady Horatia. I hope to leave town tomorrow, in which case, I shall probably be at Bovil Court, on Thursday. But I am not yet so wholly exempted from business,

as to be perfectly able to decide, within a day or two, when I may set out.

“ I am,

“ With the truest respect and gratitude,

“ Your affectionate nephew,

“ HORACE TREMAYNE.”

Blanch was very sensibly touched by many passages in this letter. His confession that Lady Horatia's arguments had “ re-animated his confidence in her love,” gave her exquisite pleasure. His inexhaustible surprise at “ the blush” which he still seems to regard in so suspicious a light, half mortified, half amused her ; and the description which he afterwards gives, rapid as it is, of his transactions in town ; of the difficulties, fatigue, and vexation to which he has been exposed, filled her eyes with tears. On hearing the sanguine hope he expresses, that the arrival of her father will be auspicious to his cause, she clasped her hands, and earnestly exclaimed : “ Oh, not with greater fervour than myself, dear Horace, do you cherish this consolatory wish !—Who is there like you ? So indefatigable in the discharge of every

filial obligation, however painful? So placable even where (in intention) so grievously injured? So unostentatiously liberal? So persevering, so firm, and yet so temperate? Oh, who is like you? And who, but your too diffident self, could doubt, that the heart which has once been yours, must be yours for ever?"

Surely my mother, had she heard this involuntary burst of affection, would not have complained that there is no tenderness in her composition!

George is arrived, and we are all wild with joy!—His wife proves to be one of my early friends, or rather favourites (for she was too young to be honoured with the name of friend), Emily Warwick, since Mrs. Cope, and now, the graceful, gentle, and engaging bride of my most fortunate brother. She has preserved her youthful looks, her fine complexion, and light, airy figure, so admirably, that at nearly thirty, she might pass for not being more

than one or two and twenty. Her widowhood has been of four years standing, which period she has chiefly spent with an uncle of the late Mr. Cope, in the South of France. She has succeeded to almost the whole of her husband's large fortune, unfettered by any restriction as to its future disposal; for he died as he had lived, a generous but unhappy-tempered man, full of real affection for her, but habitually prone to discontent, and never so eloquent as when harassing her with reproaches, or afflicting her with complaints. George and she met as travellers, some time since, upon the road between Lyons and Paris. The sight of his name upon the direction of a trunk, as she entered the inn where she and her uncle were to dine, equally enchanted and surprised her. The remembrance was still fresh in her mind, of the many happy hours which she had passed in her childhood under my father's roof; and to know that there was a Stavordale within reach, and not to send for him, she says, would have been impossible. When he attended to enquire her commands, extremely perplexed at having any to receive

from a lady to whom he believed himself to be a total stranger, she had to announce who she was, and to recall herself, step by step, to his memory, with all the minuteness which she perceived that his complete forgetfulness of her demanded. At length he was made to understand, that the Mrs. Cope, with manners so polished; a countenance and person so soft and delicate; spirits, which though not broken, were so subdued; and language so unaffectedly elegant, was no other than the wild, volatile, romping Emily Warwick, who, nearly twenty years before had, in conjunction with his own sisters, been his plaything, his annoyance, and delight. The long suspended intimacy was revived with mutual satisfaction; and they performed the remainder of their journey together. Mr. William Cope, the old uncle, soon attached himself warmly to his new companion; and on arriving at Paris, would permit him to lodge in no other house than the one which he and his niece occupied. Thus thrown daily into the society of each other; full of corresponding

recollections; both independent of control, and both encouraged in their growing attachment by their warm-hearted friend, they determined, at the end of a few weeks, to render their connexion indissoluble. George, however, previously to this, very fully and honourably made an unreserved disclosure of the embarrassed state of his affairs; mentioned the design which he had formed of establishing himself in the Crimea: and acknowledged all the privations and sacrifices to which his early profusion had subjected his father and family.—But he had to deal with kind and prepossessed auditors, who listened to his confession with the most generous indulgence. Emily was charmed that through her means, any advantage should accrue to the house of Stavordale; and the uncle, once a little too lavish himself, was the better prepared for shewing mercy to a brother prodigal. The marriage, therefore, took place, notwithstanding an obstacle which, to half the world, would have appeared so insurmountable; and a few days after its celebration, the bride and bride-

groom, with their friendly uncle, quitted Paris, and bent their course towards England.

This rapid sketch of the rise and progress of George's new attachment, is all that I have yet gleaned from either, relating to themselves. They are more disposed to ask, than to answer questions; and my brother, in particular, seems to have stored up a hoard of curiosity on family affairs, which will not be very easily exhausted. Nothing can be more natural, and I rejoice to perceive in him so much of the Englishman, the son, and the brother. Whilst abroad, with very uncertain hopes of ever returning, his anxiety about us, and our concerns, remained dormant. A letter, now and then, informing him that we were alive and well, satisfied his feelings; and as it was totally useless, he observes, to meditate a great deal upon home, he turned his thoughts into other channels, and tried to take no interest in any thing but the scenes and persons immediately around him. The case now is widely changed. He is come back a prosperous and unembarrassed man; he has resumed his place in his native

country, and looks forward to becoming an active member of the community to which he once again belongs. All the impressions which, during so long an interval, were blunted or repelled, are now recovering their influence ; and perhaps, he will, from this moment, prove himself a better supporter of the credit of his name, than if he had never known the irksome consequences of the early disrepute he cast upon it.

With regard to his person, the chief alteration which I remark in it, is his having acquired an air of unaffected consequence ; a more athletic form, and an appearance of infinitely greater vigour, both of mind and body, than he had when he left this country. In other respects, he is unchanged ; his teeth are still very fine ; his hair is of as deep a black as ever, and his eyes have retained all their brightness, with more ‘ speculation,’ and decision of character.

One very prominent object of his solicitude seemed to be, the degree of regard which we entertain for his daughter. He has enquired circumstantially, what were our feelings on her first arrival ; and asked a mul-

titude of other particulars, which denote that he takes a greater interest in her, than I had done him the justice to suppose.—We could not enter into such full details to-night (amidst all the joyful bustle and confusion of his sudden arrival), as he appears desirous to obtain; but to-morrow morning, I am to hold a *tête-à-tête* conference with him, for the express purpose of talking to him of Blanch. Another subject, however, must be discussed, which we yet have not any of us had the heart to mention to him.—I mean the disappearance of the memorandum which Clavering received from Mr. Thorpe. How rejoiced should I be, if after all the supposed importance of the mysterious packet should prove a mere delusion!

Blanch was much affected at sight of her father; a mixed emotion of joy at his return, and grief at the recollections, associated with his presence, of her dying mother, nearly overcame her. But she strove, firmly and successfully, to subdue her agitation; and in a little while, its traces disappeared. The slight predisposition which she had felt to dislike the speedy successor of that adored

mother in defiance of herself, gradually gave way also ; and she felt attracted towards Emily in a manner which she could not repel. They will, I am certain, become excellent friends. As to Philippa, she is so charmed to find in her new sister, a woman, who though still young, is not so young as herself ; who though very captivating, is not handsome enough to become formidable ; and who, without being too high in rank to exclude familiarity, is sufficiently elevated to make an excellent chaperon,—that she treats her with all her imaginable graciousness, and manifests as much affection for George, as he, in reason, can desire. He compliments her without scruple, upon her beauty, but spoils the fragrance of his incense a little, by continually exclaiming, “ How strange it is, Philippa, that you should not yet be married ! ”

Breakfast was scarcely over this morning, before my brother called upon me, according to agreement, to give him an hour’s undis-

turbed audience. I immediately complied and we retired to his wife's dressing-room.

"Well, now, Anne," said he, as soon as we were seated, "you, who were always my best correspondent whilst I was abroad, must be my most circumstantial gazetteer at home. I want information on a thousand points, and nobody can give it me in so clear and rational a manner as you can. Tell me about this love affair (to which I heard allusions last night) between Blanch and Mr. Tremayne. Who is Mr. Tremayne? the nephew of Sir Reginald Tourberville?"

"The same. But my dear George, before I enter upon the subject of Blanch's recent engagement, it is incumbent on me to talk to you of another affair, concerning which we all have felt, and still retain a great deal of anxiety. Do you remember entrusting to the care of Clavering, when she quitted Italy, some papers which she was to deliver into the hands of Mr. Thorpe, a lawyer in London?"

"Certainly, I remember it: but she was enjoined to say nothing about those papers.

How came the foolish babbler to mention them to you?"

"She never did, till attacked concerning them by the foreign valet of Mr. Tourberville, who, on various occasions, has taken the most extraordinary pains to induce her to reveal to him where they are deposited. He professed himself to be perfectly well acquainted with the circumstance of her having brought them to England; spoke of his master as a friend of yours; and, at last, came to the point blank declaration, that Mr. Tourberville and you had lately been in correspondence, and that you had commissioned that gentleman, on his arrival in England, to enquire whether those papers had been disposed of as you had directed?"

"Matchless impudence! — But go on—go on, Anne. I am all impatience to know what the scoundrel could be aiming at. How did Clavering answer him?"

"She told him that she would reply to no questions, even from his master, upon a subject he had so little concern with; and she further gave the valet such a rebuff for

his officiousness, that he never afterwards ventured any direct trial to gain his point with her."

"Excellent! the woman is worth her weight in gold! I always thought her a valuable creature. But still, I am totally at a loss to conceive what could have been the drift of this enterprise. I must see Tourberville, and enquire into the affair this very day."

"You, then, really *do* know him?"

"Know him?—Yes, perfectly. Did he never tell you so?"

"Never. But—what is your opinion of him?"

"My opinion is, that he is a degree or two worse than myself; worse than I *ever* was. To be sure, he did not nearly ruin his father: but the reason is, that his father is richer than mine, and that Tourberville's largest debts were chiefly contracted abroad, and never reached Sir Reginald's ears."

"Well, my dear brother, I will give up my useless investigation into his character, and proceed with the history of Clavering and the papers."

“The d—! have I not yet heard, then, every thing that is connected with that history?”

“No, you have not.” I then gave him an account of the supposed manner in which Mr. Thorpe’s memorandum had been stolen; of the abrupt departure of Antonio from East Vale the next morning; of the letter which I had advised Clavering to write to the lawyer; and of the preparations which we had deemed it advisable to make, to prevent Antonio from gaining access to his master with the packet (supposing him to have procured it) should he return to East Vale.

It is impossible to do justice to the mingled expression of astonishment, abhorrence, and indignation, which became visible in my brother’s countenance during this recital. He started from his chair, and strode about the room, muttering to himself broken and incoherent circumstances, in which the epithets “Villain!” “Rapacious, deceitful fiend!” were the only words which I could distinctly overhear:

“For heaven’s sake, my dear George—” I

began: but, abruptly interrupting me: "Ask no questions, Anne," he cried; "do not talk to me at present, unless you have any thing to add to your account of this infamous transaction. I must go instantly to East Vale. Tell my wife that I wish to speak to her; and do not say any thing about me to the rest of the family."

Emily and Blanch were walking in the nearly leafless plantation at the back of the house. I went to them, and on hearing George's message, the former immediately hastened away. Blanch continued her ramble, beseeching me to stay and inform her, whether I had yet questioned my brother on the subject of her mother's first marriage?

"No, my dear girl. Our conference has been short, and has related solely to the affair of the papers. Their apprehended loss appears to affect him violently. He is going in all haste to East Vale, and probably may have a very stormy interview with Mr. Tourberville. How he will be appeased, or how he will submit to being foiled, is equally beyond my power of divination. I am re-

quested, meanwhile, not to speak of what is passing in the usual sitting room."

Blanch promised to be cautious, and we parted.

George is returned unsuccessful from his mission. Mr. Tourberville refused to see him, on the plea of illness. My brother demanded access to Sir Reginald, and obtained it. He told him who he was, and said, that he had business of so momentous a nature to transact with his son, that he must solicit the favour of his mediation with that gentleman, to obtain for him an immediate interview. The Baronet was manifestly much surprised; but complied with George's request, and went to Mr. Tourberville's apartment; with as little success, however, as the servant who had preceded him. George then supplicated for pen and ink, and wrote a few lines, which he carefully sealed, and sent to the sick man's door. The note was returned, unread, and a message delivered, purporting that Mr. Tourberville was not in

a state to attend to any kind of business. Dispirited, and apparently chagrined beyond measure, George returned to Hazleford, and communicated to his wife and me the ineffectual result of his efforts. The sweetness with which Emily sought to reconcile him to his disappointment was irresistibly soothing : “ I trust,” cried she, “ that we shall go on very happily, my dear Mr. Stavordale, in defiance of the worst that this odious Tourberville can effect. — Compose your mind ; confide in the sincerity of the assurances which I this morning gave you ; and let us both determine from henceforth to dismiss the irksome subject from our thoughts.”

George caught her hand, and, with glistening eyes, exclaimed : “ You are an angel !”

Emily smiled ; and beaming upon him a look of the kindest affection, drew him down upon a seat beside her, and said to me :

“ You have promised to give us, my dear sister, an explanation of the half-angry reflections thrown out last night by Lady Stavordale, respecting the suspension, or breach — which is it ? — of the engagement between

Mr. Tremayne, and our lovely Blanch. Will you, now that we have you to ourselves, perform that promise? What are the obstacles which Blanch, it appears, deems so insurmountable, and which your mother thinks so fantastical?"

In replying comprehensively to this enquiry, it was of course "my hint to speak," and not very favourably, again of Mr. Tourberville. I described at full, the flattering, nay, the enthusiastic admiration with which Sir Reginald, from the earliest period of his acquaintance with her, had distinguished Blanch. I stated that the attachment of his nephew to her had been *more* than permitted—it had been zealously encouraged by him. The lovers, thus favoured by the approbation of their surrounding friends, had mutually avowed their affection; and preparations were immediately set on foot for their marriage. Sir Reginald was magnificent in his promises to them; Lady Earlsford, the mother of Tremayne; his aunt, Lady Horatia Tracy; her daughter—all came forward to honour Blanch by visits and congratulations; every thing, in short, was proceeding

smoothly and prosperously. Mr. Tourberville, I added, had contrived to arrest the progress of this well-moving machinery, and to unhinge effectually, as it now appeared, the whole apparatus. He betrayed Blanch into an avowal (never *meant*, however, to be mysteriously suppressed) of her mother's name and family; he then threw doubts upon her mother's character"—

"Wretch!" interrupted George, trembling with passion, and, as in the morning, rising to exhale his fury by bitter interjections, whilst, hurrying up and down the room, "Miscreant too vile to crawl upon the earth!—Is it indeed possible that *Tourberville* can have traduced the honour of Aurelia!"

"He left it to Sir Reginald," answered I, shocked by my brother's violence, yet gratified to find that he looked upon any aspersion cast on the fame of Blanch's mother as so atrocious an injury,—“He left it to Sir Reginald to explain to us his dubious insinuations, satisfied to have thrown a fire-brand amongst us, and very willing to spare

himself the unnecessary trouble of any further interference."

"Well," resumed George, stopping short, and trying to command his anger, "what were the specific charges against Aurelia, which Sir Reginald brought forward?"

"I am almost ashamed, my dear brother, —to you, who, by uniting yourself with her, gave so strong a proof of the estimable light in which you regarded her, I am almost ashamed to acknowledge their nature."

"He denied, perhaps, her ever having been married to his eldest son?"

"He did: he even went further. He professed to believe, that she was instrumental to the death of that son, by the indiscretion of her conduct; he spoke of her, in a word, on every point, in the bitterest terms of reprobation; and from that day, he has never seen Blanch, nor, indeed, chosen to have the slightest intercourse with any of our family."

"And does Lady Stavordale," enquired Emily, "regret the refusal of Blanch to become the niece of this inveterate man?"

“She regrets it in consideration of the nephew, who condemns, and utterly disclaims all faith in the allegations urged against Aurelia. During an illness through which Clavering assisted in nursing him, under this roof, he gathered from her so many affecting particulars relative to her late mistress, that his confidence in her worth is not to be shaken. Lady Horatia, from different motives, does Aurelia equal justice, and is as favourable as ever to the match : yet Blanch withstands their united representations. — She will neither consent to let Tremayne lose the fortune which his uncle avowedly means to withhold if he marries her ; nor will she enter a family where her mother’s reputation is attacked, and her own admission would be so unwelcome.”

“She is right!” warmly exclaimed Emily, “Surely, my dear Mr. Stavordale, you think with me that *our child* is right?”

“I think, at least,” answered he, touched by her generous earnestness, “that never child was adopted by a kinder or a sweeter mother.”

We were here interrupted by a message

from my father, announcing, that Mr. Westcroft was in the house, and had intelligence to communicate, which he wished us immediately to hear. We requested that, Mr. Westcroft, with my father and mother, would join us in Mrs. Stavordale's dressing-room. They did so: George and our friendly neighbour were introduced to each other, and proceeded immediately to discuss the business on which they met. Antonio, we found, was returned; at a late hour last night, he was observed by the men stationed to detain him, descending from a stage-coach within twenty yards of Sir Reginald's park gate. They waited till the coach was out of sight, and then darted upon their prey. He was, at first, extremely terrified, imagining his assailants to be robbers; and piteously implored them, in broken English, not to maltreat him; offering to deliver his watch and money without resistance, if they would but consent to release him with life. Regardless of his supplications, they bound his hands, and conducted him, as they had been directed, not to a public house, as was at first intended, but to a small farm, held by

one of my father's tenants. When safely lodged there, under the *surveillance* of the farmer and his son, the men who had seized him, repaired to Mr. Westcroft, and informed him of their success. It was then past eleven o'clock; but he immediately accompanied them back to the place from whence they came. On his arrival, Antonio perfectly recovered from his panic, demanded, in loud and blustering terms, the reason of his detention? Mr. Westcroft said very little to him; but, assisted by his people, proceeded to search him: "And I promise you," pursued our friend, "I did not do the thing by halves!—I had him disarrayed to his very shirt; every pocket turned inside out; the lining of his garments examined; the crown of his hat, and even the interior of his boots and shoes. No Custom-House officer ever performed his part more rigorously:—but all in vain!—Nothing was found upon the fellow of a suspicious nature, except this dirty scrap of paper, on which is scrawled, I imagine in his own *orthography* and *autography*, the name and abode of *Mister Thorpes, Essexes Strit, Strande*. On finding it, I looked

hard in his face, and saw traces of confusion in it which had not yet appeared. He obstinately refused, however, to give any account of his motives for being provided with such a direction ; threatened me with the utmost severity of his master's choler ; and, as it was probably the first time that he had ever been suspected with any appearance of injustice, he triumphed and vapoured like a man intoxicated by unaccustomed success. It was too late when I left the farm," concluded Mr. Westcroft, " to come and plague you, my good friends, with news of my failure ; and therefore I went home, crest-fallen and disappointed, determined to see you this morning, and join with you in bewailing our total want of luck as counter-plotters of experienced knaves."

My brother thanked him warmly for the zealous pains which he had taken ; and said, that since all chance was at an end of arriving at the truth through the medium of Antonio, he thought, as Mr. Tourberville positively refused to hold the least communication with him, that the only way of attaining to any certainty would be, to take a jour-

ney to town for the express purpose of seeing Mr. Thorpe : " His silence," proceeded George, " to the letter which my sister induced Clavering to write to him, induces me to believe, that he has either given up business, and retired into the country, or that he is ill. The direction found upon the valet is similar to that which I gave Clavering when she left Italy : but it may not have answered his purpose ; Mr. Thorpe may be no longer in town, and, in that case, my papers are safe."

" I sincerely hope that you are right," said Mr. Westcroft ; " but I am curious to know whether the lawyer's address, so vilely transcribed by Antonio, was affixed to the receipt which Mrs. Clavering suspects him to have robbed her off."

I went immediately to put this enquiry to Clavering ; who answered, that Mr. Thorpe had only signed and dated the acknowledgment, but that the name of his street had been indorsed by herself on the outside of the paper : " And that, Ma'am, I am afraid," she added, " is what gave the person who stole it, such facility in pitching upon the or, like a fool, I had written at

full length, as a help to my own memory,
Lawyer Thorpe, Essex Street, Strand.

This explanation appeared to us all a striking confirmation of Antonio's villainy; and Mr. Westcroft said, that it rendered the circumstance of his possessing the direction, so strong a presumptive evidence against him, that he thought it would amply justify us for detaining him in custody till my brother's return. This project was overruled;—my mother said, that to put it in execution would be equivalent to an open declaration of war against the Tourberville family, the head of which, Sir Reginald, little as he might, in his heart, value his graceless son, could not, in decency, suffer such an affront to be put upon him, in the person of his servant, without some manifestation of resentment: "Let the worthy agent then," she added, "be restored to his worthy employer. They can effect no fresh mischief by simply meeting in Charles Tourberville's den; and whatever evil they may already have accomplished, or even have attempted to accomplish, will be ascertained by my son's journey to town, and, on his return, will best obtain redress by a direct ap-

plication for it to the principals themselves. This man is but a paltry tool, unworthy that we should bestow upon him, individually, any further time or attention."

In these sentiments my father and brother coincided. Mr. Westcroft, consequently, was requested to order the liberation of Antonio; and it was ultimately determined that George should set off for London immediately.

"If," said he, "I recover these mysterious papers, you shall all be made acquainted with their contents;—if I lose them, no one but my wife shall ever know their purport."

"Thank you for the timely notice!" cried my mother, "Let us hope, however, that your wife, with all her perfections, is not come amongst us to shew off as *The Wonder!* or, *A Woman keeps a Secret*.—I hate prodigies, and faultless monsters!—and, thank the fates, we have hitherto had none of any description in the family. Anne comes the nearest to that kind of thing: but I am happy to say, that even she is by no means a finished paragon."

George is gone ; he drove from the door about two hours ago, and we who fancied last night that the gloom which has lowered over us for some time past, would, in so great a degree be dispersed by his presence, find ourselves, on the contrary, more depressed now than we were before his arrival. The strong proof given by the step he has taken of the value of the papers, has increased our anxiety for their fate; and this anxiety is accompanied by a painful sense of mystery, that adds doubt and apprehension to our other feelings. Emily affects to treat the matter lightly; yet I can perceive, that she is not so exempt from uneasiness as she would be willing that we should imagine. When asked—if the object of her husband's journey is of so little consequence—why she looks so thoughtful and absent? she tries to smile, and attributes her gravity to regret at being obliged to endure this separation from him. She speaks not from her heart, I am convinced;—there is more in her inquietude

than mere concern on account of his absence ;—and the certainty of this, dejects us all.

Miss Tracy, and her faithful escort, Lord Glenmorne, has just been here. Spiritless as she found us, she declares that we are all vivacity compared to the inhabitants of East Vale. “ Charles Tourberville,” she added, “ is at last, I do verily believe, compelled to acknowledge, both to himself and others, that there may be some danger of his shortly bidding the world farewell. He permits, it is true, only domestics to go near him, and their report, perhaps, is not wholly to be depended upon : but, if even *half* that is related respecting the scene which passed in his room this morning, is true, there needs no more to prove that he is in a very fearful state. During a violent paroxysm of rage, caused, they aver, by the messages conveyed to him from Mr. Stavordale, he was attacked by a fit of coughing so tremendous, that it ended in his spitting blood in very large quantities. It was probably not the first time that he had suffered from the same complaint ; for he manifested little alarm ;

and being provided with strong stiptics, soon succeeded in arresting its progress. He was after this composing himself to sleep, having ordered the room to be kept perfectly quiet, when Antonio burst in upon him, and, regardless of the debilitated and tremulous state in which he lay, began a vehement discourse in Italian, which revived Tourberville's agitation and fury to such a degree, that the bleeding returned with a violence which he no longer had the power to stanch. The valet, frightened at his own achievement, sent off, with the utmost dispatch, for Mr. Crosby. That gentleman came, and having administered what he deemed expedient, and seen his patient a little reanimated, asked to speak with Sir Reginald, and recommended his sending for further advice. Messengers have accordingly been hurried off in different directions (one, I believe, to London) for physicians. Sir Reginald, suspecting, perhaps, that his presence in the sick chamber would neither be beneficial to himself nor his son, goes no farther than the anti-room; but that he seldom quits; and there sits my patient mother with him; and,

from what she has told me, I learn that Mr. Crosby thinks Charles in the most imminent danger, and believes that, at intervals, the poor wretch is aware of the circumstance himself. When able to speak, he has once or twice expressed a desire for more medical assistance; and, meanwhile, takes, even with eagerness, whatever Mr. Crosby prescribes for him. Thus," concluded Helen, "you see that my prediction, as to the fatality which would probably attend the *Ides of November*, is extremely likely to be verified!"

We invited her, since every thing wore so *sombre* an aspect at East Vale, to spend the remainder of the day with us: but she said that it would be inhuman entirely to desert her mother at such a time; adding, however, that perhaps she might come again in the evening. We thought her reason for going back too good to be opposed, and at the end of half an hour she went away. I accompanied her into the hall, and was much gratified by the animated encomiums which she bestowed upon Emily: "You have gained," said she, "a new sister, my dear Miss Stavordale, who is remarkable in the

highest degree for being what the French would call *une femme d'un vrai bon ton*. Her manners are delightful ; her deportment is all grace ; she is gentle without being insipid ; and elegant without ceasing to be easy and natural. And she has a heart too ! Her tone of voice when she addresses Blanch, her expression of countenance when she looks at her, quite enchant me ; they are not the promise only, but the positive beginning of true affection. I give you sincere joy of such an addition to your family ; go back to her, and make much of her ; and when Mr. Stavordale returns, tell him that, unsight, unseen, I love him for giving to his daughter so charming a mother."

When I repeated this to *my* mother, the observation which she made upon it was characteristically singular ; " I wish with all my heart," she cried, " that George had given the little perverse chit a genuine shrew for a stepdame ! She might then have been glad, in self-defence, to accept the honourable protection which she now so ungratefully rejects. Emily is a simpleton, and encourages all her wayward and absurd heroics. I can forgive

her, however, for she and Horace are strangers; but Blanch, who so well knew him—Blanch, who professed to love him—Blanch is wholly inexcusable!"

It would really be a most happy circumstance for Tremayne, if he could transfer his passion from Blanch to my mother.

After tea yesterday evening, Emily, Blanch, and I, left the gayer members of the family to enjoy their customary amusements, and sought for more quiet in the seclusion of the library. Mr. Lloyd, who had returned in the morning, Lord Earlsford, Mr. Elsmere, and one or two of the Paulets were here; and not being in spirits to participate in their liveliness, we thought that it would be kinder to them as well as to ourselves, to carry our grave faces elsewhere. Miss Tracy had sent word by Mr. Elsmere, that it was uncertain whether she would be able to come at all; it was just possible that she might step in for an hour; but not till after eight o'clock. Accordingly, at about a quarter before nine,

we heard a carriage drive up to the gate, and rang to give orders for her being shewn into the library. In a few minutes the door opened, and I arose to meet and welcome her: but it was no female who entered;—it was, to our unutterable surprise, my brother,—accompanied by Mr. Tremayne. Emily sprang from her seat, with an exclamation of delight, and flew to her husband; Blanch sat still, changing colour every instant,—trembling with emotion,—and yet, unconsciously, as Horace approached her, extending towards him her shaking hand.—He seized it with grateful eagerness; joy the most effulgent sparkled in his eyes, and irradiated his whole aspect. ‘How different to the aspect with which I had last seen him!—For some moments, he seemed incapable of utterance; he could only gaze in her varying countenance; press her hand to his heart, and seek by degrees to fold her there herself. She gently, however, withstood this attempt, at which, recovering voice, he half reproachfully, half tenderly exclaimed: “Still so obdurately repelling?—Must I, then, make interest with a higher advocate,”

glancing a look at her father, “to induce you to shew me some little mercy?”—

Emily, who during this interval, had been engaged in brief but eager parley with her husband, now hastily approached, glowing with animation, and taking Blanch in her arms, rapturously embraced her. George, meanwhile, fancying that he heard footsteps in the hall, secured the library door; and then, returning, said to me, with a smile:

“Can you in the least divine, Anne, what all this means?”

“Indeed I am utterly bewildered!—What has brought you back so unexpectedly? How did you and Mr. Tremayne become known to each other? Why is Emily in such agitation of spirits?”

“Hold, hold!—You ask too much at once. I shall never be able to answer separately all these enquiries. Sit down, my dear sister, and let me tell my story my own way. You must afterwards, with what qualifying you may think necessary, reveal it to my father and mother. *Your* indulgence I am sure of: theirs, perhaps, I have less right to depend upon.—You ask, what has

thus suddenly occasioned my return? The recovery, through Mr. Tremayne's means, of the important packet.—Come hither, Blanch," continued he, stretching out to her his hand, and when she drew near, putting his arm round her waist—"Come hither, and prepare yourself to hear wonders.—You have loved your mother," he added, in a softened voice, "as she *deserved* to be loved; and the sacrifice, which, from motives of respect for her memory, you were willing to make of all your own prospects of happiness, I am the last to think, was greater than *such* a mother demanded—But, my dear girl, that sacrifice is no longer required from you.—Her fame is cleared; the certificate of her first marriage is found; a living witness of the ceremony, whose evidence is unimpeachable, can be brought forward to attest its validity; and was sought out, and finally discovered by the well-directed, and unremitting exertions of the gentleman who now stands by your side, waiting with such impatience for one little glance of kindness."

At these words, Blanch, whose tears had been falling fast from the moment that

George began speaking of her mother, suddenly ceased weeping, and looking up with a smile of ecstasy, disengaged herself from his encircling arm, and springing towards Tremayne, threw herself upon his shoulder, in silent, but expressive gratitude.—With what tenderness she was received, need I attempt to describe?—“Once more, my own!” exclaimed he, “For ever, now, my own!—Sweetest Blanch—how exquisitely this moment repays me, for every passed anxiety and suffering!”

My brother arose, and approaching, and again casting his arm round her, said, with much feeling: “Shall I, Blanch,—or had you rather hear it from this active friend of yours?—shall I go on with my tale of wonders? Can you bear more joy? Can you bear to know, that he has been instrumental in defeating the machinations of a wretch who sought to defraud you of your birth-right? that by becoming his, you will secure to him, in all probability the hand of an heiress?”

“An heiress, my dear father?” cried

Blanch, looking round with one of her long banished playful smiles.

“You think, saucy girl,” resumed he, his own face involuntarily reflecting the smile upon hers, “you think that I have left myself nothing with which to make an heir-ess of you!—Mr. Tremayne, try what her faith in *your* veracity may incline her to believe:—tell her the rest of the story yourself.”

“Must I tell her,” cried Horace, cautiously observing the effect which his words produced—“that by the gift of her hand, she will, in *every sense*, be conferring upon me greater obligation and honour than I have merit to deserve? That the claims which she derives from birth, though we both are of one race, so infinitely exceed mine.”

“For pity sake, Mr. Tremayne,” interrupted Blanch, fixing her eyes upon him with a mixture of impatience and alarm, “what are you saying? you seem to me, to be talking—not very wisely!—are you aware of the strange things you are uttering?”

“Perfectly, dearest Blanch.—I am aware of having intimated that there is affinity between us; and I have intimated nothing beyond what

is strictly true. You are a Tourberville—the grand-daughter of my uncle—the posthumous child of his eldest son, Joscelin ; and the register of your birth, with the certificates of your mother's marriage—for the ceremony was twice performed, once by a Catholic, and once by a Protestant minister—were both inclosed in the same packet which now, once more, is safely restored into the possession of Mr. Stavordale."

Whether my own astonishment, or that of Blanch, was greatest, on hearing this most extraordinary declaration, it would be difficult to decide. We both, with distended eyes, examined the features, alternately, of my brother and Mr. Tremayne ; nothing in the countenance of either seemed to disprove the authenticity of their tale. We turned next to Emily ; her face, bright with smiles, exhibited an image of the liveliest pleasure ; and the evident enjoyment with which she marked our perplexity, added to the gaiety of her expression. At length, Blanch found voice, though still breathless with agitation, to say, in broken and hurried accents, " Has every belief, then, which, from my infancy,

I have been taught to entertain concerning my own origin, been a fable? Have I been intruding an impostor into this family? Oh, Sir—why was I appointed, though unconsciously, to act so deceitful a part.”

“Hear his motives, ungenerous Blanch!” cried Emily, jealous for the honour of her husband, “hear how truly and disinterestedly he has consulted your advantage by what you so harshly condemn, and—beg my pardon for accusing him.”

Blanch, however, could not so easily be appeased. She turned to me, with a look of wistful affection, half repressed by distrust of the feelings with which I should now regard her, and sorrowfully said:

“Must I no longer call myself your niece? Must I lose the pride and pleasure I have had in thinking that I belonged to you, and had a sort of claim upon your kindness—your indulgence—your protection? Oh, what can ever make me amends for so heavy a privation?”

I threw my arms around her, exclaiming, “Fear no such change in me, my dearest Blanch. Whatever may be your name—

whatever your family—my love for you is now become too independent of the mere ties of relationship, to experience any diminution.”

“ And remember,” subjoined Emily, desirous of giving a more cheerful turn to the conversation, “ remember, Blanch, that if you lose an aunt, you acquire in Mr. Tremayne—what you never had before—a cousin.”

“ I had forgotten that circumstance,” said Blanch, irresistibly provoked again to smile, “ and how very needful it was to procure for me a little favour in his sight.”

Tremayne, enchanted by this gleam of returning gaiety, caught her hand, and, leading her to my brother, who seemed patiently determined to await, rather than to anticipate, our further enquiries, he placed her in a chair beside him; secured to himself the still unoccupied seat on her left hand, and then said, “ You have heard it proposed, my Blanch, that Miss Stavordale should be entrusted with the office of communicating to her family the *mysteries of the packet*. Listen, therefore, now, to what her brother has to

detail, for we may be interrupted, and it is desirable that the explanation should take place with as little delay as possible."

We all united in entreating George to begin, assuring him, that we should be careful, for our *own* sakes, to give him no interruption.

"I have abstained," said he, addressing Blanch, "from entering into a partial vindication of myself, touching the flagrant 'imposition' of which you charge me with having made you the unconscious instrument; well knowing, that a circumstantial relation of your mother's story would prove the best justification of my conduct which I could bring forward. I must now go back to the date of my first acquaintance with her. My dear Emily," continued he, looking affectionately at his wife, "I am not afraid of speaking of her in your presence, with the admiration so eminently her due; you have often heard me expatiate upon her excellencies with a sensibility equally honourable to her and to yourself. She was, indeed, a being of a superior order. As unassuming and simple as if bred in a village, with as

noble a form and character as would have dignified a throne. I was one of the few Englishmen occasionally admitted to the privilege of visiting her and her husband, during the short period of her comparative prosperity ; that is to say, before the rash fury of poor Joscelin destroyed the bond of union which rendered them both so happy. Never was picture of domestic felicity more perfect than that which I have seen displayed in their secluded but cheerful dwelling. They lived but for each other ; and so various were their resources, so congenial their tastes, and so similar their accomplishments, that had their profound retirement been even involuntary, I question whether the world had allurements sufficient to extort from the breast of either the faintest sigh of regret. At the termination of the fatal combat which deprived Joscelin of existence, he required me to be sent for, and I attended him from the field in which he was wounded, to the porch of his own house—where he expired : but little, during the melancholy removal, was he able to say ; for the ball had penetrated his chest, and respiration every mo-

ment became more laborious to him ; that little, however, was all spoken in reference to Aurelia. He told me, that had he lived, she would, ere long, have made him a happy, however indigent, father ; he conjured me to be her friend, and the protector of their child ; to assist and counsel her in the present disastrous crisis ; to write to his family in her behalf ; and to treasure, as I would my life, the certificates of his marriage, which he directed me where to find."

Blanch wept over this description of the solicitude of her dying father for herself, though unborn, and for her desolate mother, with an excess of emotion that shook her whole frame. George hastened to turn from the afflicting scene ; and omitting all further details of a period so calamitous, thus proceeded :—

" I forwarded to Sir Reginald Tourberville, shortly after the death of his son, an attested copy of the certificates, and a declaration of his daughter-in-law's expected confinement. No acknowledgment of their reception was ever sent to me. I wrote again. My letter was answered by Charles,

the deceased's brother. He informed me, with strong, and, apparently, sincere professions of concern, that his father, unwilling to admit the authenticity of my documents, and determined never to own Aurelia as his daughter, nor her child as the legitimate offspring of Joscelin, *had burnt* the certificates, and sworn, that not even the verdict of a Court of Justice (if I chose to appeal to one) should compel him ever to countenance or benefit so hateful an intruder into his family!"

Blanch shuddered, and I saw that it was with difficulty she suppressed an indignant exclamation. George, without appearing to notice her disturbance, thus went on:—

"When I received this furious message—for in what other light could I consider it?—Aurelia was slowly recovering from a dreadful illness, the result of horror and grief at her husband's tragical fate. She was gradually becoming sensible of the deplorable situation of her affairs. Joscelin, had he not been so prematurely cut off, had intended to seek military employment in the service of some Protestant Government; and

in the interim, with the most rigid economy, had subsisted upon the interest of a small bequest left to him, when he was a child, by a maternal relation, and secured from the controul of his father. This little property, in case of his decease, was, both interest and capital, to devolve to his brother. He, therefore, had been wholly unable to make the slightest provision for his widow; and she remained, except from the assistance of her father, completely destitute. It was long ere the sate of her mind enabled her to bestow any attention upon this very secondary cause of inquietude; but after the birth of Blanch, four months subsequent to the event of the duel, the penury with which she was threatened appeared to occasion her some alarm; and she, at length, gained courage to ask me, how the terrible intelligence which I had probably transmitted to England, had been borne, and what disposition had been evinced towards herself and her infant? I own, that I was but little solicitous to make a more favourable representation of Sir Reginald's intentions than they in reality merited. Love, pity, esteem, and admiration,

all combined to make me passionately desirous of engrossing to myself the happiness of serving and sustaining her. I had no hope that she would attach herself to me as she had to poor Tourberville; but so distractedly was I enamoured of her, that I thought the mere endurance—the calm regard, springing from a sentiment of gratitude, of *such* a woman, would be more to me than the most fervent tenderness of any other. I shewed her, with, perhaps, too little preparation, Charles's letter. Its effect upon her was terrific. She found herself, at once, insultingly defamed; condemned, with her child, to utter indigence; a burthen upon an ill-provided, and now nearly sightless father; and in danger of soon being reduced to subsist upon the eleemosynary aid of a young, unmarried man, a stranger to her country, and bearing to her no species of relationship by any tie either of consanguinity or alliance. The fever, from whose ravages her life had but so lately been redeemed, returned with ten-fold violence; and bitterly did I lament the selfish want of caution by which I appeared to have devoted her to the grave.

She recovered, however, yet tediously, and for a long time imperfectly; but the animation of her character was gone for ever, though its sweetness remained unimpaired, and gave a charm to her society, which endeared her to me, more and more, every hour. Yielding to my incessant importunities, she, at length, bestowed upon me her hand; and, notwithstanding the unconquerable dejection which, in defiance of all her efforts, adhered to her through life, the kindness of her disposition made me amends—and I was happy. I owe to her, indeed, obligations the most essential; she fortified my principles; she unchained my faculties; she ameliorated, by steadyng, my temper. Never demonstrative, she was invariably indulgent, and unparadingly complying. All she claimed in return, was liberty to shelter her helpless father in our dwelling, and permission to dedicate to his comfort that portion, at least, of her time which I should be willing to leave at her disposal. I felt no wish to refuse to just a request, and poor Castelli's last sand was run beneath our roof."

At this part of my brother's narrative, I interrupted him to observe, that I could not but think it extraordinary, he should, from the circumstance of having experienced *one* failure, have discontinued all endeavour to remove the obloquy which had been cast upon Aurelia's honour, and consequently reflected upon his own. "Imagine what the estimation must have been in which you were held," added I, "whilst virtually considered as the husband of another man's mistress."

"I will not bear," cried he, angrily, "so degrading an expression even from *you*, Anne! You wrong me by supposing that I was so indolently negligent of her fame. The moment that I became aware Charles Tourberville was upon the Continent, I wrote to ask him to appoint a place of interview. He chose Lausanne, where we then resided. Blanch, who, from the period of my marriage, when she was about two years old, had, in every successive scene which we had visited, passed for my daughter, very naturally grew up in that persuasion; and Aurelia, thankful to be spared the danger (should she meet with any Englishmen acquainted

with the Tourbervilles) of becoming the object of calumnious reports, was deeply sensible of the advantage to her child of being privileged to adopt an undisputed name, and to consider me as her parent. Fearful, however, that Charles might, on first seeing her, unguardedly betray, either to Blanch herself, or to some stander-by, the secret of her real descent, Aurelia sent her, with her nurse, to board for a few days in the country; and then prepared for Tourberville's arrival with comparative tranquillity. He came;—he resided with us nearly a week; and manifested such friendliness towards us both, that I own he misled me into an entire belief of his sincerity, and impressed me strongly with an opinion, that, had his power to serve us been equivalent to his inclination, there was no effort of zeal which might not have been expected from him;—but he was then, he told us, in personal disgrace with his father; and, as an excuse for forbearing to act, pleaded, not without great shew of reason, the danger of effecting rather harm than good, by any direct interference in so delicate an affair. He offered, however, if we would

entrust him with the original certificates, to despatch them to a friend in England, who, being much in the confidence of Sir Reginald, might find a favourable moment, when some gleam of compunction evinced itself, for presenting them to him. Aurelia objected to the experiment. Her confidence in Charles Tourberville fell far short of mine; and she uniformly shrunk from surrendering to his disposal, the sole vouchers upon which her claims to justice, both as a mother and a wife, depended. We, therefore, with suitable expressions of gratitude, declined his proposal: suggesting, that the only prudent way in which he could undertake to benefit us, would be, by seizing every opportunity, when writing home, or, when recalled to Sir Reginald's presence, of preparing that gentleman for the future production of his grand-daughter's claims. Charles submitted to our refusal with so good a grace, that I was confirmed in my dependence upon the honourable and disinterested motives by which he had been actuated; and, on hearing him express a desire to see the little Blanch, I set out myself to bring her back from the farm-

house to which she had been sent. On arriving there, I found that she, and two other children belonging to the people she was with, had exhibited, that morning, symptoms which indicated that they were all sickening with the measles. Of course, she was immediately flown to by her mother, who, till her perfect recovery, never quitted her an instant. Thus, Charles left Lausanne without either beholding the child at all, or again seeing Aurelia. From time to time, we continued receiving letters from him, filled with complaints of his father's persevering displeasure, and with murmurs at the ill-fortune of being born in dependence upon a man so incapable of being worked upon either by time, or the most humble concessions. It was natural, from this, for Aurelia to conclude, that, if so unrelenting to his own offspring, there was small prospect that he would shew more placability to *her*;—and, by degrees, she abandoned all expectation—nearly all wish, as far as related to herself only—of living to experience the happiness of being acknowledged. But it was not with equal fortitude that she contemplated the

hopeless aspect of her daughter's affairs; and a thousand different schemes suggested themselves to her for securing to the child her natural inheritance. She sometimes thought of bringing her over to England, and presenting her in person to Sir Reginald, with every document which could prove the legality of her pretensions:—but then, the idea of abandoning her blind and aged father, came, with painful keenness, across her mind, and she renounced the project almost as soon as it occurred. The state of my affairs did not, at that time, permit me to accompany Blanch hither myself; and to send her alone was impossible. Nothing, therefore, was decided upon, though nothing was so uniformly uppermost in her mother's thoughts, till the period arrived when the scene had closed upon poor Castelli, and Aurelia herself became persuaded that her own untimely end was approaching. Inexpressibly anxious to give her whatever consolation, in her last moments, the peculiar circumstances in which we were all placed admitted, I proposed consigning her daughter, when she should be left motherless, to

the protection of my family, as *my own* child; and I specified, at the same time, the propriety of sending over with her the testimonials of her birth, with a charge to Clavering, to whom the young orphan was to be entrusted, to deposit them in the hands of an eminent English lawyer, whom I had formerly had occasion to consult, and to whom a letter, accompanying the papers, might serve to reveal their importance, if not their exact purport. By corresponding afterwards more regularly than heretofore with my eldest sister, I should secure the means of knowing the properest moment for authorizing Mr. Thorpe to bring forward the proofs which he held; as the house now occupied by my father, bordered, I had been told, upon the principal estate of Sir Reginald Tourberville, and easy access therefore could be had to every requisite information respecting any changes which might hereafter occur in the Baronet's family, likely to be of advantage to his grandchild's interest. This plan," continued my brother, "whatever may be its aspect in the *daughter's* eyes, was listened to by the dying *mother*, with ecstasy!—It sooth-

ed her departing spirit, and was hailed by her with a sensibility which I have no language to describe.”——

“ Oh, forgive—forgive me !” interrupted Blanch, attempting to sink upon her knees before him, and with streaming eyes raising her clasped hands in supplication towards him—“ Forgive me, in remembrance of that dear mother, for whose sake you have been to me so generous—so unexampled a benefactor !”

George, eager to prevent the humiliation upon which, in person as well as in spirit, she seemed resolved, caught her in his arms ere her knee touched the ground, and affectionately cried out—“ I do—I do forgive you, my poor girl !—By what could you judge, but by appearances ? And what could be more unfavourable than those were, till this explanation took place ?—Think no more, then, Blanch, of the momentary error into which you fell. All you have now to do, is to make your peace with Emily.”

Half afraid to meet my sister’s eye, Blanch yet ventured to direct towards her a deprecating glance, which was answered by a cor-

dial kiss, unaccompanied by any other remonstrance than the almost smiling one, of “Did I not tell you, naughty child, that all this would end in your being forced to beg my pardon?—I grant it, without the smallest reservation.—Now, therefore, suffer Mr. Stavordale to proceed with his narrative.”

“Oh, most gladly!—I long to hear all that remains to be told.”

“That *all*,” resumed my brother, “may now be comprised in few words. After sending you and Clavering from Florence, I was detained at that place a considerable time longer, by unavoidable business; and when I quitted it, found myself obliged to undertake a journey into France, in order to concert measures with the friend who had engaged me to accompany him to the Crimea. For some affairs of his own, he had found it expedient to reside for a season at Paris. You know already, that, on the road, I had the good fortune to encounter Emily and her uncle: and the result of that meeting, you perceive, was completely subversive of my emigrating plan. During the very early period of my abode in the French capital, I one

day, in the course of my wanderings, was familiarly accosted in English by a husky, hollow voice, so totally unlike any that I could remember ever to have heard before, that when I turned my head, and saw the miserable individual from whom it had proceeded, I believed myself to have been addressed by some stranger who had mistaken me for a different person. I was, however, speedily undeceived, and extremely shocked, to discover in a man upon whom ill-health had made such dreadful havoc, the gay, vigorous, and handsome Charles Tourberville, whom, so few years before, I had seen in all the pride of manliness and strength. Apparently, he was unconscious of his altered looks; he spoke, at least, with a vivacity that astonished me. His first enquiries were directed to ascertaining where I lodged, and how long I meant to remain in Paris?—He next pressed me to call upon him; declaring, that since I was housed with people of whom he knew nothing, he should not have half the satisfaction in seeing me at my own apartments, as at his. I agreed to visit him the following day, and wrote down his address with that

intention. But the following day—and the next—and many days—in short, even weeks elapsed, and I found no time to fulfil my promise. Emily was so much more attractive an object to me, that when she asked me to accompany her to any of the places which she had an inclination to see, I never could resist her; and Mr. Cope was so alert in bringing her intelligence of every thing worth inspecting, that scarcely an hour of the twenty-four, those only devoted to repose excepted, remained without its allotted engagement. A message from Charles, delivered early one morning at my bed-side by his valet Antonio, first recalled me to a serious recollection of what I had pledged myself to perform. I got up immediately; and, without trusting myself to see Emily before I went, lest her well-known influence should turn me from my purpose, I lost no time in hastening to the abode of my long-neglected countryman. His reproaches, though vehement, were rather jocose than angry. He made strong allusions to the supposed fascinations of the lady with whom I was an inmate; asked me a thousand questions concerning her; and,

as the day was then actually fixed for our marriage, drew from me a frank avowal of the real state of the case. I have now ample reason to be assured, that my information was bitterly unpalatable to him : but such was his command of features, that nothing in his aspect betrayed his internal vexation, and his felicitations were as animated as, in my eyes, they were unfeigned. Having exhausted himself in civil speeches, he proceeded to talk of his father, and of the appeal which he concluded that I should soon make to him, in person, on behalf of Joscelin's daughter : — But, my dear Stavordale," continued he, in a tone more serious than I had ever heard him assume before, " you must not, in seeking to obtain justice for the descendant of *one* brother, be regardless of doing what would inevitably ruin the *other*. My father is still so adverse to any reconciliation with me—so ready to cast me off for ever, that I have been informed, upon undoubted authority, he some time ago made a positive tender of all my rights of inheritance to his nephew, Horace Tremayne, upon the sole condition of his assuming the name

and arms of Tourberville. This was refused; but still Horace, I am assured, firmly retains his hold over the old gentleman's heart; and it is further reported, that, with the full consent of his uncle, he meditates to make proposals of marriage to your reputed child, the unacknowledged daughter of Joscelin, now residing, I understand, with your family, in the neighbourhood of East Vale. If this alliance takes place, and the bride, on your going over, is immediately discovered to be my father's grand-daughter, nothing can save me! I shall be deprived, in behalf of his two favourites, of every guinea which he can leave from me, and sentenced for the rest of my days to the most abject poverty.—You may suspect, perhaps, Stavordale, that I deceive myself as to the state of my health; that I am insensible of the decay of constitution which threatens me with speedy dissolution; and that these fears of destitution in a man so near his end, are ridiculous and contemptible. But you are in an error; I am as fully aware of my danger as you can be, and as, possibly, every individual is who looks at me. I will not however, whilst I live, go about

tolling my own knell, and forestalling the undertakers' dismal faces, to give 'note of preparation to the sexton!—Yet, I shrink from being despoiled before my eyes are closed. I have creditors whom I am most anxious to satisfy; I have domestics whose long services I wish to recompense; and I have friends whose good offices I am solicitous to prove were not exerted in favour of an ungrateful object. If my father, however, adopts, during my life-time, another heir, the dispositions which I have made by will for the discharge of my debts, the reward of my servants, and the acknowledgement of the friendship which has been shewn to me, all become vain. The expences which may attend my final illness, and the charges of interment, will swallow up the whole of what, when dying or dead, I may possess; and the veriest beggar who expires in an hospital will not be more destitute of means to repay the humanity of his last attendants, than the only surviving son of the wealthy Sir Reginald Tourberville!"

"Unprepared," pursued my brother, "to hear him speak so unambiguously of his own

situation, and unavoidably compelled to feel for a man who had the courage so forcibly to depict the catastrophe that awaited him, I besought him to point out to me the line of conduct by which I could best contribute to his peace of mind, without endangering the interests of Aurelia's daughter. "Defer," cried he, earnestly, "your application to my father, till my doom is sealed! the delay will not be tedious; and the few bequests which I desire to have the power of securing to a small number of survivors, will cause too trifling a diminution in the amount of her future fortune, to be felt. If you wish it," continued he, "I will put into your hands a schedule of my intended testamentary donations which will enable you to judge how far, without detriment to her rights, you may permit yourself to sanction their execution. This offer," continued George, "I, for various reasons declined: but I could not look at, and hear him, and harden myself against the weakness of yielding to the request which he had, in so striking a manner, preferred to me. Having suffered him to gain his point, I endeavoured to terminate my visit. All

his levity (whether real or assumed) returned, on finding me, as he pretended, in such haste to go: "If you do not take care," cried he, laughing, "this new lady of your affections will do more towards retarding your exertions in Blanch's cause, than I should by living these dozen years! she seems to occupy your thoughts so exclusively, that I tremble for the safety of the musty documents which will be so indispensable towards effecting the poor child's recognition." I begged him to be assured, that those had long been in perfectly secure custody; they were already, I told him, transmitted to England, and placed in the hands of a professional man whose integrity I knew I could rely upon. "I am glad to hear it," cried he, in the same tone of banter, "they would else, you will allow, now your head and heart are so pre-occupied, have run some risk of being mislaid or forgotten. Did you take the wise precaution of forwarding them to your honest lawyer, the moment you fell in love?" "No," said I, "they were conveyed to him many months since, by the

person who attended Blanch to my father's house."

"On this imprudent avowal," pursued my brother, "and upon the firm dependence on the inviolability of my promise not to act during his life-time, have been founded all his subsequent schemes for gaining possession of these long-coveted papers. He probably thought that I should grow suspicious if he made his questions more direct, and therefore abstained from asking the *name* of my legal friend; but, departing secretly from Paris the very next day (at least so I conjecture by the length of time that he has now been at East Vale,) he proceeded immediately to England, with the hope of obtaining, ere I should be apprized of the route which he had taken, all the remaining information which he wanted from my agent, Clavering. Yet, even if I had been instantly made acquainted with his removal from Paris, nothing would have been further from my thoughts than the supposition that he had any design of going to *England*! The tissue of falsehoods with which he had abused my ear, had led me to consider him as a man sentenced to

interminable banishment, and standing in too much awe of an inexorable father, to dare break through the boundaries assigned him. I have since, with indescribable astonishment, learned that, for many years past, his exile has been voluntary ! Nor would it ever, in all probability, have ceased, had he not had an object in view, which could alone be accomplished by his personal exertions. He does not love this country, though he so often affected to lament the tyranny which prohibited his revisiting it. His covert endeavours, by the aid of Antonio, to betray Clavering into an avowal of the lawyer's name, I need not recapitulate. He had extorted from me a positive engagement to write, the moment our conference broke up, to my *friend the pettifogger*, as he chose to style him, strictly enjoining him never to let the papers I had confided to his care pass out of his hands, till he received authentic information of the decease of Mr. Charles Tourberville. Awful to him as will probably be the real approach of death, he has not scrupled, in order to effect a purpose of present interest, making a mockery of its ter-

rors. Having, by means of the theft committed by his worthy subordinate, at length obtained possession of Mr. Thorpe's address, he dispatched the valet to town, *in a complete suit of mourning*, to carry the news of his supposed demise to him whom it was to betray into a surrender of his trust. Now Mr. Tremayne," concluded my brother, "it is *your* turn to speak ; and in good truth, I am heartily glad of it, for I never had so long a story to tell in my life, and I really am tired to death. In all that remains to be said, yours is the active and prominent part ; —mine, a secondary and insignificant one."

Tremayne began his portion of the recital, by stating, that having business before he left town to transact with his Lawyer (the very Mr. Thorpe whose name is now become so familiar to us), he called at that gentleman's house one morning, just after receiving a letter from Lady Horatia, and found him newly returned from an excursion into the country, with innumerable unopened letters upon the table (poor Clavering's, no doubt, amongst them) which, however, he seemed too much pre-occupied to examine,

as he was walking up and down the room in evident disturbance, which, when he saw Mr. Tremayne, was converted into the most marked astonishment.

“I asked him,” continued Horace, “why my appearance excited in him so much surprise? and whether he had imagined that I had left town?”

“No, Sir,” answered he, “I hardly thought that you would do that without letting me know where to direct to you: but after what I have heard, I was startled to see you out of mourning?”

“Indeed?—And pray, who did you expect to see me *in* mourning for?”

“Why, Sir,—I am informed that your cousin, Mr. Charles Tourberville, died last Tuesday.”

“Then, you may be assured,” resumed I, “that your informant was mistaken. I have a letter in my pocket, dated Wednesday morning, which came by this day’s post from East Vale, and contains no mention whatever of the event of which you are speaking.”

And then, supposing I had said enough to

rectify so groundless a report, I would have begun talking of the business which had brought me to his house: but though, in general, sparing, even to dryness, of every word foreign to the matter in hand, Mr. Thorpe found it impossible to let me go on without some further discussion of the strange intelligence, which, only three minutes preceding my arrival, had been circumstantially communicated to him. A man dressed in black from head to foot, speaking broken English, and looking very dejected, had called upon him, he said, by order of Sir Reginald Tourberville, to demand the immediate delivery of a packet of papers, which his son, Mr. Charles Tourberville, a few hours before his decease, had informed the Baronet were lodged in Mr. Thorpe's hands. These papers, Sir Reginald understood, had been consigned to Mr. Thorpe by a gentleman still abroad, (George Stavordale, Esq.) with directions to keep them till he should receive indubitable information of the demise of Mr. Tourberville. An acknowledgment of their safe surrender, which Mr. Thorpe had given to the woman

who brought them from Italy, was then produced by the *man in black*, and immediately recognised as genuine. Yet, the worthy lawyer could not clearly understand how the exhibition of this memorandum contributed to authenticate the dismal personage's mission. He told him, that its production, even by the woman herself, would not have entitled her to claim the restoration of the papers ; it was only meant as a voucher to her master, of the fidelity with which she had executed his orders. The wily negociator, if disconcerted by this remark, disguised its effect upon him, and composedly replied, that Sir Reginald was fully aware the memorandum could not act as a warrant for the delivery of the papers : but that, as his son had died without specifying distinctly who the professional gentleman was in whose custody they remained, the Baronet had felt relieved from much perplexity, when the woman who consigned them to Mr. Thorpe, and who now lives in the neighbourhood of East Vale, came forward with the little voucher, merely to assist Sir Reginald in ascertaining Mr. Thorpe's direction. The an-

swer was plausible, and on that part of the subject, satisfied the lawyer: but he was, no doubt, sufficiently troublesome in asking *other* questions. He enquired why the Baronet had sent a person upon such an errand without any written credential? The man in black attributed the omission to the mingled state of grief and agitation into which Sir Reginald had been thrown, by the somewhat sudden, though certainly not wholly unexpected calamity which had befallen him. Further interrogations were replied to with the same specious calmness. The solemn messenger, with tears in his eyes, stated himself to have been the personal and favourite attendant of the deceased, for upwards of four years; he detailed the commencement and progress of his dear master's illness, in a manner so fully agreeing with all that Mr. Thorpe had previously heard upon the subject; and he touched on such a variety of particulars not only respecting Mr. Tourberville himself, but other individuals of the family, which the lawyer knew to be true, that he began to think they could only have been spoken of so authentically by

a person who had really held the situation which this man professed to have filled. The result of the matter was, that Antonio received orders to call again in two hours, when the papers, he was told, should be prepared for delivery: but on the express condition, that one of Mr. Thorpe's clerks should be their bearer to East Vale, in company with the but half accredited valet. No proofs of distrust, however humiliating, stirred up in the meek emissary any disposition to remonstrate; he submitted with an acquiescent bow to what was proposed, and departed.

“The whole of this scene,” continued Tremayne, “I found no difficulty in convincing Mr. Thorpe, had been acted with some flagitious purpose. At the same time, I suggested to him, that as the papers belonged to Mr. Stavordale, he could scarcely be justified in resigning them even to my uncle himself, without an order from their owner: “But, sir,” said Thorpe, “I know, that on the decease of Mr. Tourberville, they are *meant* to be consigned,—at least, announced, to the Baronet. They relate, I

am well assured, to affairs in which he, more than any other individual, is interested."

"I enquired, but without wishing him to betray what he knew, whether he was fully acquainted with the nature of those affairs? No, he said,—he was not: and at that moment, the recollection came across him, that Mr. Stavordale, in some letter written long before the papers came to England, had intimated a probability of being obliged, at some future period, to institute a process against Sir Reginald, for the establishment of certain claims which these very papers might be necessary to substantiate. Poor Thorpe, who is not quite so young nor so clear-headed as he has been (and the fact is, that a recent illness has materially weakened his abilities), looked aghast at the oversight which he had been in such danger of committing. When I told him that I had great reason to believe, Mr. Stavordale was either actually arrived, or hourly expected in England, his condemnation of himself became more painful than ever. I was not sorry, I own, to have an opportunity of gaining some advantage by his dismay: and I frankly told him, that if he

would trust the papers to *my* honour—and he had known me from a boy—they might be the means of introducing me to the acquaintance of Mr. Stavordale with more beneficial effects to myself, than any other credentials which I could present to him. I was going down, I added, immediately to Bovil Court, and if Mr. Stavordale should not be arrived at his father's when I reached my journey's end, I would return them by some safe conveyance into his (the lawyer's) hands: 'No, no, sir,' cried the self-upbraiding old man; 'keep them till my client *does* arrive. I am not a match, I find, for the quips and quirks of this cunning Italian; and I really should be glad to wash my hands of the whole business. I only understand it by halves; and I should do no good in it, unless Mr. Stavordale sends me fuller instructions.' Thus amply authorised, I took possession of the packet; and after waiting long beyond the appointed two hours for the re-appearance of Antonio, with whom I much wished to hold a little parley, I bore off my prize in triumph. The valet, I have since heard, never repeated his visit. It is probable that he

saw me enter Thorpe's house ; and concluding, that his whole scheme would be frustrated by my unwelcome interference, prudently determined neither to render himself liable to detention, nor to chastisement.

“ It was some days after I received the packet, ere I could entirely terminate my affairs in London, and direct my willing course towards Staffordshire. Yesterday morning, however, I began my journey ; and to-day, whilst waiting for fresh horses at the last stage but one from hence, I saw a hired chaise and four drive up to the inn, attended by a footman in the Stavordale livery. Leaning eagerly forward from the window of my own vehicle to catch a view of the person occupying the one newly arrived, I beheld a gentleman whose cast of countenance and general air, bore a sufficient resemblance to the Stavordale family (my head was full of Stavordales) to justify me in my own eyes for dispatching my servant instantly to know who he was. The answer he brought me decided my conduct without further deliberation. I sent Wilson with my card to the door of his chaise, soliciting the favour

of five minutes conference on business of importance. My application prevailed ; we both alighted, and entering the inn, called for a private room. There, after a preface as brief as I could make it, I surrendered to him, apologizing for my officiousness, the packet which I had been the means of preserving, as I believed, from falling into dangerous hands. Too much agitated to speak, he snatched it from me ; gazed at the writing on the cover with a smile of almost incredulous ecstasy ; tore it open, and after a momentary but intent inspection of the papers which it contained, held forth his hand to me with a look of animated, frank, and delighted friendliness which I shall never forget. He told me, that by the opportune delivery of those papers, I had spared him the disagreeable, and, as was now apparent, fruitless exertion, of a journey to town ; he thanked me cordially for the measures which I had pursued respecting them ; and, in short—uninfluenced by the treachery of my kinsman to regard me with distrust—admitted me to a full participation of every secret connected with the blessed packet. We

conversed long, and with mutual interest, on the exhaustless subject ; and when informed that only one set of post horses could for some hours be procured, ordered them to be put to my chaise, and drove off—two very happy men—side by side, in the same conveyance.”

Though a thousand questions remained to be asked and answered relative to all that we had been listening to with such avidity, it was now become indispensably necessary, to provide for the chance of being interrupted, and to form some decision as to the properest time and manner of communicating these wonders to my father and mother. I began by unlocking the door, to take off the appearance of mystery from our conference, which such a circumstance must have given rise to, had any of the family sought to join us. I then asked, whether George was quite determined that it should be *my* task to impart the story to those whom it was so necessary not to keep in voluntary ignorance? George positively declined the enterprise; at least, he undisguisedly shrunk from making any personal communication to my

mother. I must acknowledge, that I had not much more appetite for the task myself, though they were all so willing to resign it to me. From Blanch, it would have been every way unreasonable and improper to require such an effort: and Emily, though conscious that she is in the high road to favour, still feels too little assured of her influence, to put it to so formidable a test. We all looked at Mr. Tremayne; who, smiling at the silent appeal, said, "Command me as you please; I am too happy to be diffident."

Blanch looked much pleased at this arrangement. "Mr. Tremayne," said she, half laughing, "is certainly the fittest person to make the tremendous discovery. His interest here, I know, to my cost, is so high, that every thing, I believe, would be sooner forgiven, than the sin of opposing his wishes."

"Oh, delightful," exclaimed he; "there is nothing I like so much as being made a spoiled-child of! You have, I hope," added he, addressing Blanch, "been well tormented on my account? lectured? reproached? put in the corner? and sent supperless to bed?"

“No ;—I have only been sent—to Coventry. Grandmamma, I believe, has scarcely spoken to me twice since the day that you were here last.”

“Commend me to such a jewel of a grandmamma! How I honour her for her noble malice. But come, my sweet little *disgraciée* ; let us go and shew her, and all the world, that my wrongs have been redressed, and may now be pardoned. I cannot stay to-night to enter upon the full explanation which you have assigned to me the province of giving her; but, before I run off to obtain a short interview with Lady Horatia, I must have the pleasure of seeing how my patroness will look, on beholding us walk, arm in arm, into the room.”

Blanch held back, reluctant to make such an exhibition; but Tremayne, ungovernably happy, would take no denial. He drew her hand under his arm, and marching off with her, said, as he left the room, “I shall insinuate, Mr. Stavordale, that all this peace and amity between us, is the result of your generous exertion of paternal influence in my favour; by which means, I shall secure to *you*

also, a gracious welcome after your little trip, Is not this making a magnanimous use of the partiality with which I am honoured?"

When he was gone, Emily, after expressing great approbation of all that she had hitherto observed in him, said, with some uneasiness, "But if he enters upon no explanation to-night, what are we to answer, my dear Mr. Stavordale, should we be asked—why you have given up your journey to town?"

"I will beg my mother," replied George, "to defer her enquiries till the morning, referring her to Mr. Tremayne; who, I doubt not, will breakfast here, for their full elucidation. I would not attempt to make the disclosure to her of the imposition which I have ventured to practise upon them all, for any bribe that the world could offer me. My father I can better deal with; and though I shall be vexed if I find him very seriously offended, yet I am aware, that concessions and apologies will have some effect upon him, and after a while he will be appeased. But my mother's biting and sarcastic mode of resenting whatever she disapproves, I well

know that I never did, nor ever can, submissively bear."

The colour rose in his face as he spoke, and to divert the angry thoughts which brought it there, I communicated to him the accounts which Miss Tracy had given us in the morning, of Charles Tourberville's hopeless situation.

"Miserable creature!" exclaimed George, "to how little purpose has he been involving himself in such a labyrinth of fraud and iniquity! From what Mr. Tremayne has told me, I do not believe, that the harsh language attributed to Sir Reginald on the subject of the certificates which I sent to him of Joscelin's marriage, ever proceeded from his lips; or, that the certificates themselves were ever suffered to reach his hands. Charles was the determined persecutor of his brother from the moment that he fell into disgrace. He had always, Lady Horatia says, been jealous of the superior estimation in which he was held; and when, to this envious spirit, was added the hope of becoming sole heir to the hereditary estate, avarice gave fresh activity to his rancour. Of late years, another

inducement has urged him on to seek the ruin of Joscelin's child. He has a natural son, Mr. Tremayne informs me, the offspring of the woman whom he seduced and eloped with. This boy, still very young, has, however, been hitherto brought up with the strictest care: and Charles, heartless as he is to others of his kindred, may almost be said to idolize him. Excessive fondness for this child, and a latent expectation of outliving the Baronet, notwithstanding the gloomy forebodings with which he talked to me of his approaching death, have stimulated him, with ceaseless ardour, to strive for possession of the proofs of Blanch's legitimacy, in order to destroy them before his father should be induced to acknowledge her, and to name her in his will as the next after himself in the succession. If he dies, at last, a victim to the disappointment of his own projects of injustice, who can pity him?"

"Deceitful, and evil-minded as he has been," said Emily, "yet, for the honour of human nature, methinks, I am glad that it has not all been wickedness for mere wickedness' sake; that he has had a *motive* for his

conduct, which, though it cannot vindicate, yet somewhat lessens and accounts for its persevering obliquity."

I now asked George, whether he could by any means explain the circumstance of there having been so strong a report in the neighbourhood of his marriage and intended return from abroad, for several days before the arrival of the letter which announced those events to my father?

"*The* letter?" repeated he, "did you then receive only one?"

"No more, I assure you; but there were, I thought, in that, many indications of its only being a sequel to some other."

"Then this," cried he, "is a fresh instance of Tourberville's crooked policy. I wrote to him and to my father on the same day; to him, merely to express my surprise at his leaving Paris so clandestinely; and to tell him, that since he was, as I accidentally learned, reinstated at East Vale, I hoped soon to have an opportunity of seeing him, as I was preparing immediately to visit my family in Staffordshire. To my father, I wrote a detailed account of the renewal of my ac-

quaintance with an early friend of my eldest sister, &c. &c.; and these letters, sent to England by a private hand, I enclosed under the same cover, and, as he was a member, directed to Sir Reginald Tourberville. Charles must, in some way or other, have possessed himself of both: but why he thought it necessary, for the success of any of his plans, to secrete the one intended for my father, I am at a loss to understand."

"Had you alluded in it to the affairs of Blanch?"

"Very obscurely, if at all. I had given Charles my word, you know, not to bring them under public discussion during his life; and though I was offended and perplexed by the strange contradiction evident between the language which he had held to me, and the real predicament in which he appeared to stand with his father, yet I had determined to do nothing hastily; to withdraw the promise which I had made to him, only upon a positive conviction that he had been acting a double part with me, and had some sinister view in requiring the young orphan's claims to be kept back. It is to be

presumed, that the report of my impending arrival, was unguardedly spoken of by Antonio, to whom he might have mentioned it, without cautioning him to secrecy, till it was too late to prevent its spreading.—As he never chose, in this family, to appear acquainted with me, I conclude he had no wish that the news should be traced to him.”

A bustle in the hall, here drew our attention, and we heard the voices of Tremayne and his friend Elsmere, bidding the party in the opposite room, good night, and most cordially replied to by half a dozen speakers, amongst whom my mother was, at once, the gayest, and the most audible.—A few seconds after they were gone, the library door opened, and first Philippa, and then my father and mother, accompanied by Blanch (so completely reinstated in the latter's good graces that she was leaning upon her arm) poured into the room.

“A pretty hocus-pocus trick you have been playing us, good people!” exclaimed my mother in the highest spirits. “We thought the whole evening, that the carriage

which drove up soon after you left us, had brought Miss Tracy to make one of your junto; and not deeming, to own the truth, a mere quartet of females, better than a game of cassino, I neither felt inclined to disturb you myself, nor did any of the rest of the party. Imagine then, my unutterable surprise, when I saw my dear, ill-used, regretted, animated Tremayne (worth more than all of you put together!) enter the room, radiant with joy, and drawing forward, half by compulsion, this little blushing, but dimpling, almost smiling simpleton, in whose furtive glances, sedulously as she sought to avert her face from my gaze, I detected, in an instant, nearly as much happiness as in the looks of Horace!—What followed, I really can scarcely tell; but I believe that I embraced them both, in defiance of all observers—all decorum. How their reconciliation has been so suddenly effected, and what has brought George back so expeditiously, is to be disclosed, I am told, to-morrow; an embargo, for to-night, is laid upon my spirit of enquiry: but provided it is satisfied in the morning, and satisfied by Tremayne—from

whose lips nothing but good can proceed—I am resigned.”

The certainty of escaping all embarrassing interrogatories, was a cordial to the spirits both of George and his wife, which enabled them to answer my mother with a cheerfulness almost equal to her own.

Philippa took an early opportunity of alluding, for the edification of my brother and Emily, to the beauties of the snug retreat (Birchinghurst), to which Blanch was in so fair a way of being conveyed; and she found great delight in repeating, without much softening, the account which she had heard given of that place some weeks since, by Lady Horatia. They listened to her without appearing quite so ready to lower their estimate of Blanch's good fortune as she had probably anticipated; Emily only saying: “I am very sure that where there is affection, there will in all places be happiness.”—And George, drily observing, “I wish, Philippa, for your sake, that offers were more frequent even of such paltry abodes as Birchinghurst!”

My mother thoroughly enjoyed this

speech: indeed, it was so much in her own spirit, that she could not but be satisfied with it. My father, who always takes the part of those he thinks too hardly dealt with, looked at Philippa with one of his kindest smiles, and said, "Never mind them, my dear—never mind them;—offers which are a little slow in coming, are often the best worth accepting: and after all, we are in no hurry to part with you."

"I wish, Sir," said Philippa, tears starting to her eyes, "I wish there were others as ready as yourself, to make this kind assertion!"—And lighting her bed-room candle, she coldly bade us good night, and left the room.

"George," said my father, when she was gone, "you have quite sunk her spirits; she was almost ready to cry."

"Pooh, nonsense!" exclaimed my mother, "the spirits had nothing to do with it! Where opposition or reproof create a very prompt disposition to shed tears, the *temper* is more in fault than the *spirits*; and such persons, but for shame, would stamp and

scold instead of crying. Philippa was put out of sorts to-night by something she heard relative to Mr. Elsmere; and that is the key to these pathetic lachrymals."

The dreaded explanation is over, and thanks to the ability and influence of Mr. Tremayne, has been borne with infinitely less irritation, than—even when given by *him*—I had apprehended. The great subject of regret with my mother, seems now to be, —not that Blanch was ever introduced here under false pretences—but that, by its being proved that she is not a Stavordale, the prospect of becoming nearly allied to Horace is wholly at an end!—This is carrying the prepossession in his favour, nearly as far as it can go.

My dear father, who heard the relation jointly from Emily and me, was deeply touched by many parts of it, and often exclaimed, "I should have done just as George did!—Poor young woman!" meaning Au-

relia, “ she had many sorrows in this world ; I pity her from my soul.—She seems to have been exemplary in the discharge of every duty ; as a daughter, a mother, a wife, I never heard of any woman who acquitted herself better.—Oh, I am very sure, that I should have done exactly as George did !”

With so truly benevolent a disposition to work upon, our task was no very arduous or distressing one. I was sent, when the detail was over, to assure George of my father’s perfect forgiveness, and to invite him to his presence. Their meeting affected both Emily and myself, very sensibly ;—it was on one side, all indulgence and placability : on the other, all gratitude and manly affection. They will love each other the better, throughout their lives, for the feelings each evinced on this critical occasion.

My mother, amongst other inducements to lenity, suggested by Mr. Tremayne, was made acquainted with an instance of the generosity displayed by her new daughter-in-law, which has (and very deservedly), excited her admiration in an almost enthusiastic de-

gree. It appears, that when George, determined on seeking a conference with Mr. Tourberville, sent for his wife to explain to her the apprehensions which he entertained respecting the testimonials of Blanch's birth, she instantly and earnestly conjured him, if they should prove irrecoverable, to preserve for ever inviolate the secret, which, in such a case, it would be at once so barbarous and so useless to proclaim; and to determine from that moment, to provide for the dear girl as their real daughter, without ever allowing it to be suspected, either by herself, or his family, that his obligation so to act was less than parental!—To this feeling and noble proposal, George, full of gratitude and tenderness, knew not how to oppose the shadow of an objection. It relieved him from an embarrassment so painful; it secured the guiltless intruder from so much unmerited mortification; and it obviated the danger of such endless family reproaches, that he very naturally hailed it as the most unquestionable and affecting evidence of his wife's attachment, which she *could* have given him. And, in truth, so must we all consider it.

Blanch, who scarcely needed any additional motive for loving the charming woman who had spontaneously held forth to her the encouragement of a reception so caressingly maternal, since hearing the above trait of unostentatious goodness, contemplates her with a reverential affection, a devotedness, an admiration, as genuine and as pure as the benevolence to which they owe their origin.

The aspect of affairs at East Vale, so far as relates to Mr. Tourberville, remains nearly unchanged. Mr. Crosby, and other medical men summoned from different quarters, affirm, that he is in a state from which recovery is almost impossible: yet, that he *may* linger many weeks, or expire the next hour. He is, at times, perfectly sensible, but too weak to speak. This morning he admitted Tremayne, during a short interval, to his bedside. Horace, as he told me in confidence, dismissed the attendants, and spoke to the poor wretch of his son, offering, if it could afford him any gratification, to send for the child, who lives with a tutor somewhere near London, and to devise the means of introducing him privately into Charles's apart-

ment. Sir Reginald is ignorant of the boy's existence, and were he made acquainted with it, would never consent, Tremayne believes, to his admission into any house inhabited by himself. Charles seemed to catch at this proposal with transport, and signified his acceptance of it, by an energetic pressure of his cousin's hand. Wilson, therefore, has been made the bearer of a few lines to the gentleman with whom the child resides, and is to bring his young charge, with all reasonable dispatch, to Bovil Court. What would Lady Earlsford say to such a pollution of her dwelling?

Lady Horatia Tracy, whom her nephew has already put in complete possession of the narrative related by my brother, has written to Blanch the kindest and most affectionate letter that ever was penned. She undertakes to communicate the whole interesting story to Sir Reginald, and pledges herself for its favourable reception:—"Whatever efforts he may have made, sweet Blanch," her Ladyship continues, "to dislodge you from his heart, you occupy there too secure a station, to have been dispossessed even by his utmost

endeavours. Except your lamented father, and our more fortunate Horace, no one has ever been so dear to him as you *were*, and *are*. When, therefore, in addition to being, as he has long known you, the darling of Tremayne, he discovers you also to be the child of Joscelin, how will his bosom find room for the *conflux of affection*, which from so many causes will pour into it?—I wait but till I can secure to myself the undisturbed disposal of his time, to enter upon my important task. He is at present deeply engaged with some gentlemen who are here upon business. *Yours* also is business, my dear girl, I allow : but of a nature that would ill assimilate with theirs, which is wholly of the *head*, whilst yours is chiefly of the *heart*. Hope every thing from the result of our conference, that you have the fullest right to desire and expect.”

“ My hopes and wishes,” said Blanch, handing to me this letter when she had read it, “ are so divided, that I scarcely know myself towards what point they incline the most. A discovery which it is supposed will again

render me, in the eyes of Sir Reginald, an acceptable wife for his nephew, certainly cannot be regarded by me with indifference; it likewise removes every aspersion from my mother's memory; and will give me, in Lady Horatia and Miss Tracy, two connexions whom I can never sufficiently respect and value. But there the bright colouring of *that* side of the picture terminates. Sir Reginald, were he ten times more my grandfather than Sir Geoffrey, would never be half so dear to me!—I loved him once; but he has chilled my regard: and if he ever regains it, I suspect that it will not be without an effort which will cost both him and me some pains. I will do my best, however, as well because he is the uncle of Mr. Tremayne, as because he was the father of my own parent, to rekindle my affection for him: but I must think of him oftener under the former than the latter character; he certainly shines more as an uncle than as a father,—and not much in either capacity!—The fact is,” concluded she, “that do what I will, I cannot cease wishing, rather to have been

a Stavordale than a Tourberville. Here, there is a steady warmth of heart, a social ease, and an absence of all pomp and tasteless grandeur, which I shall never find at East Vale. And where shall I find such an aunt, and such a grandmother, as I have found in you and Lady Stavordale?—Where such a paternal friend as I was blessed with in your brother? or so generous, so sweet a protectress as I had gained in his lovely wife?”

“To all this, dearest Blanch,” said I, embracing her, “I have but one word to answer: Horace must be taken in compensation for whatever you believe yourself to have lost by the exchange of Tourberville for Stavordale affinity. Ask yourself honestly, my little friend, whether, all things duly considered, it may not be well worth while to renounce being one of our race, in order to become (what you had otherwise refused to be) his companion for life?”

These words brought a smile upon her lips, and a sparkling lustre into her eyes, both so expressive of the happy flow of ideas which they had awakened, that as I looked

at her, she recalled to my remembrance, and I internally applied to her, one of Dryden's most beautiful lines :

“ And Paradise was opened in ‘ her’ face.”

Neither my sisters nor Jane Tourberville have yet been made acquainted with the full details connected with the present state of Blanch's affairs. We wait till we know what line of conduct Sir Reginald will pursue. Should he, contrary to all our better hopes, refuse to acknowledge her, Emily and George have determined to take her immediately to town, and there to fix her residence with them till her claims have been decided by a legal process. The living witness of the double marriage of whom my brother spoke, is the same old servant who was once mentioned to me by Lady Horatia, and who (I remember her telling me) brought over the first tidings of Joscelin's death. She had also talked of him to her nephew, who, at the time, made a memorandum of his name and supposed age, and set on foot, amongst the senior domestics of his uncle, every en-

quiry in his power, in order to ascertain whether any of them remembered him, and could furnish the least clue by which to trace his present residence. Only one individual belonging to the actual establishment,—an old gamekeeper—had any recollection of such a person. From him Mr. Tremayne learned, that John Woodford (the name of the required witness) had relations at Kingston, in Surrey, who, probably, might be able to give some account of him. Before Tremayne had had time, after gaining this intelligence, to write to Kingston, or to devise any other method of investigating the business, Lady Earlsford's abrupt departure from Bovil Court instigated her son to *as* abrupt a pursuit of her. During the eventful period of her absence, he dedicated two whole days to the task of making personal researches at Kingston for the man in question ; and, at last, began to see a glimmering hope of success : but not till he had also taken a journey to Rochester, and thence, I believe, to some third place, where his toils were repaid, by meeting the object he so anxiously sought. John Woodford, in per-

fect possession of his faculties, though very lame and infirm, was living with a married grand-daughter, and had never engaged in the service of any other master since the death of "the excellent young gentleman, whom he had followed, with many a bitter tear, to an outlandish grave." He gave Mr. Tremayne, circumstantially and readily, all the information that could be wished for respecting the two ceremonies at which he had been present; and offered to come forward, at any time, or in any place that might be appointed, to bear evidence upon oath to the truth of what he asserted. Tremayne, to provide against the danger of losing a deponent whose age and weakness seemed to render his existence so precarious, wrote down, from the old man's lips, a full recapitulation of all that he had been stating; and this paper being read to him, and acknowledged to be perfectly accurate, he was asked whether he would suffer himself to be conveyed to the nearest magistrate's, in order to sign and swear to it in his presence?—Without the slightest demur, honest Woodford consented; Tremayne accompanied him to

the Justice's, and, with his strictest attention to all the customary forms, the deposition was sworn to, and is now, with the documents which he rescued from Antonio, in Lady Horatia's hands, to exhibit to the Baronet.

Surely, with *such* evidences before him, every doubt must be removed from Sir Reginald's mind.

When Mr. Tremayne took all this trouble to procure proof of the marriage, he had not the most distant suspicion that Blanch was the descendant of that marriage. He was solicitous merely to satisfy her mind on the subject of her mother's fame, and to convince his uncle that he had impeached it unjustly.

My mother agrees with me that the Baronet now can plead but *one* remaining cause of complaint against Aurelia; and we have applied to George, to know how far she can, on that point, be fairly defended. She has been accused of having given at least tacit and apparent encouragement to Sir Reginald's passion, at the very time when she was listening clandestinely to the addresses of his son; and the vindictive father, long

before he loaded her with so much obloquy for marrying, as he supposed, with such indecent precipitation after the death of Joscelin, abhorred her on account of the pangs which he had himself suffered, as a deluded and mortified lover.

To this my brother answers, that unfortunately Aurelia's conduct, at the period alluded to, and Joscelin's judgment, were both much too confidingly submitted to the influence of Charles. It was his aim, from the moment he detected their attachment, to insinuate himself into their counsels, and to give them exactly the species of advice most calculated to exasperate his father against them, and, if they eloped, to render their return impracticable. He assured them that the only way to blind Sir Reginald to their mutual affection, was to let him flatter himself with the hope that his own assiduities were acceptable. They urged, from principles of honour and gratitude, the strongest objections against so perfidious a mode of acting. Charles laughed at their scruples, and affirmed, that what they considered as a serious passion was only a transient fit of

superannuated gallantry, by no means worthy of being treated with such high-wrought delicacy. If they would only be patient, and forbear giving any shock to the old gentleman's vanity, there could not be a doubt, from his well-known versatility of taste respecting beauty, that ere long he would be attracted by the graces of some other charmer; and then Joscelin might with comparative boldness declare his engagement, and solicit the consent of his father to its fulfilment. This dangerous recommendation, aided by the timidity which their critical position inspired, they were infatuated enough to follow; and severely indeed was the deviation from rectitude punished! Aurelia never forgave herself for having, in that instance, departed from her character, and yielded, though contrary to her own sense of right, to suggestions which, even if well meant, were founded upon such shallow and sophistical reasonings. Joscelin was preyed upon by the same feelings of self-reproach, and the consciousness of their error, and of the ill-effects it had produced upon the mind of the Baronet (as described to them in the

letters of Lady Horatia), rendered their efforts to soften him fearful and feeble, and materially contributed, ever after, to paralyze the exertions which Aurelia would otherwise have made to secure the recognition of her child. Her marriage, she said to George, might indeed be proved; but what could prove her innocence of the treachery imputed to her? What could clear her from the charge of having deliberately permitted Sir Reginald to become her dupe? In educating Blanch, she added, one of her first objects should be to impress deeply and indelibly upon her mind the necessity of acting, in all circumstances, with the most transparent candour—the most direct and inviolable truth and openness. Whilst she lived, it was clear there could be but little hope that the Baronet would countenance her daughter: “And often, during her last illness,” continued George, “she has, with a melancholy smile, observed, in allusion to Blanch, that the death of a mother who had so little known how to retain the power of befriending her, would be the happiest event that could befall her!”

What a scourge has this dreadful Charles been to all whose interest came in competition with his own! How will Sir Reginald be horror-struck when he hears what a fiend-like part this degenerate son has, nearly through life, been acting;—yet, hear it he must, or how will Blanch's story be made intelligible to him? How will the procrastinated disclosure of her birth, or her adoption by my brother, be accounted for? That sort of feeling which, in tenderness to Charles's present situation, would shrink from exposing his passed misconduct (as far as such exposure is necessary to vindicate the reputation and attest the rights of others), I hold to be a feeble-mindedness of which Lady Horatia is incapable. She has all the materials requisite to clear the perplexities of her narrative; even this last instance of Charles's refinement in artifice—the insidious advice by which Joscelin and Aurelia unhappily suffered themselves to be misguided—my brother, during their long *tête-à-tête* on the road, communicated to Mr. Tremayne, and he very wisely stated it to his aunt. These

materials, I trust, she will not fail to employ to the utmost advantage of her client.

* * * * *

A summons is just arrived from East Vale, written in evident haste by Lady Horatia, requiring the immediate return thither of her nephew, and soliciting also the presence of my brother. They, of course, departed without the delay of an instant; and we are left, till they come back, to all the miseries of suspense; and, as Blanch expresses it, “the heart-beatings of alternate hope and fear.”—My mother asked her, upon what her hopes and fears principally turned? Whether, upon the splendours of East Vale, or the illustrious sacrifice of her lover which, if affairs went unfavourably, she might think it necessary to repeat, for his own peculiar comfort, and the edification of the world?

Her answer charmed my mother.

“I meditate,” answered she, with unhesitating sincerity, “no sacrifice whatever. Whether rich or poor, if Mr. Tremayne will accept me,—now my descent from a blameless mother is so clearly proved,—my hand shall be his as freely as my heart.—Poverty

will neither disgrace, nor, I hope, make him unhappy ; but had he married me before the charges against her were refuted, *they* would have done both."

My mother caught her in her arms, exclaiming : " Noble girl !—Noble, and *truly* generous girl !—I have done you injustice, Blanch ;—I have misprised and underrated you. Anne always told me so, and perhaps, at intervals, so might my own conscience : but it is difficult, at a certain age, to admit new impressions ;—and, trust me, nothing *could* be newer to me, than the idea, that at sixteen, a girl could have a reasonable motive for doing any thing extraordinary. I should have understood you better, had I been less biassed in favour of Horace, but your rejection of *him*, appeared to me a trespass so enormous, that it called for all my indignation, and justified all my unkindness. Take this advice from me, however—the best that could be given you, though it proceeds from a prejudiced and petulant old woman,—always act up to your present notions of rectitude, and persevere through life in thinking *Honesty the best policy*.

After the little dialogue last recorded, Blanch and Emily sallied forth yesterday on a peregrination through the village, to see the little school which my mother patronizes, and to visit two or three of our poor pensioners, whom I had not been able to call upon for several days. They had been gone about two hours, when I was called away in all haste from Clavering's storeroom, where she and I were very busily, though not very amusingly engaged, to receive what the housemaid was pleased to style—"A coachful of company. I had rather, just then, have been without the company: but, after some delay, I allowed Clavering to lock up her presses, and proceeded towards the drawing room.

In my way I was met by George.

"Move a little quicker, dear Anne, I do entreat!" cried he, "they will lose all patience.—Where is Blanch?—Where is my wife?"

“ They are out walking. But tell me, brother, what has passed at East Vale? How long have you been returned ?”

“ I can tell you nothing now ; go to the library, and there you will hear it all. My only business at this moment must be to find Blanch. Tremayne is already in search of her, but I fear without success. Which way is she gone ?”

“ Send a servant on the errand,” said I, again moving forward. “ You would never be able to understand, new as you are to this place, the directions which you ask me to give you.”

At that moment he uttered a half-smothered exclamation of joy, and darting out of the hall, ran down the steps, and immediately re-appeared, drawing Blanch eagerly forward, and saying to his wife :

“ *You* must not shew yourself yet ; I only want this girl !”

And the next minute, without further explanation, he ushered her into the library—into the presence and the arms, outstretched as she entered, of her grandfather.

I was too little composed myself, to retain

any distinct remembrance of what passed during the first agitated moments of this most interesting interview. All that I can recal to mind is, that the venerable Baronet, straining her to his bosom, and lavishing upon her the most endearing epithets, exhorted her to forgive his long estrangement—his pride—his inflexibility—and henceforth, to think of him only as a sorrowing, humbled, old man, bowed down with shame for the misdeeds of one son, and with grief for his own inhumanity to another!

Blanch's grateful heart was not proof against a reception so full of tenderness, and an address so melancholy and self-upbraiding. She clasped her arms round his neck, and sobbed upon his bosom; but incapable of speaking; insensible of the presence of any other human being, she was only aroused to a consciousness that there were witnesses of the scene, by hearing a voice, never heard by her with indifference, exclaim, in a tone of heartfelt joy:

"How passionately have I wished to behold this blessed reunion!"

"Ah, dearest Mr. Tremayne," cried Blanch,

turning towards him her streaming eyes, "help me to express what I feel ; help me to tell this newly-found parent, how truly we will love him ; how anxiously we will strive to make him happy ; how zealously we will venerate and honour him !"

The sweetness of look and voice with which this was accompanied, and the manifest sincerity of soul in which it was spoken, overcame the already fluttered spirits of the aged Baronet, who, shedding "tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum," withdrew himself gently from her arms, and burying his face in his handkerchief, was forced to walk some paces from her to recover greater firmness. She looked apprehensively after him ; but being withheld from following by Mr. Tremayne (who had returned from his ineffectual pursuit of her a few moments after the meeting took place), she cast a glance round the room, and for the first time, perceived Lady Horatia Tracy, as well as my father and mother, all regarding her with the kindest sympathy, and evidently much affected by the scene. "Ah, kind and dear Lady Horatia," cried she,

flying towards her, "what do I not owe to your active and friendly exertions!"

Lady Horatia, mingling praise the most flattering of her passed conduct, with the brightest forebodings of her future worth and happiness, embraced, and warmly congratulated her; adding, "My daughter, dear Blanch, was with much difficulty prevailed upon to absent herself from this meeting. She knows all the circumstances which have just come to light, and longs for an opportunity to offer you her tribute of felicitation. She charged me, as I refused my sanction to her appearing here in person, to tell you, that, as Horace's cousin, you must consider yourself also a little as *her* cousin, and must love her the more, accordingly:—and she particularly begged me, likewise," continued her Ladyship, looking round for my brother, "to make a point of seeing, and, in her name, telling Mrs. Stavordale, how fervently she honours, applauds, and admires her for her noble proceedings during the short-lived period of her maternal reign. Shall I not be allowed, Sir," concluded she, smiling, "to execute my commission?"

Well pleased to be sent on such an embassy, George bowed, and immediately left the room to go in search of his sweet wife.

Sir Reginald, now, having regained more composure, ventured again into our circle, and seating himself with Blanch by his side:—

“ This,” said he, taking her hand, “ is the first hour in which I have known any intermission from keen mental suffering, since you and I, sweet Blanch, last met. When I condemned myself to lose the solace of your presence, I knew not the severity of the trial which I had prepared for my feelings. I have missed you, and regretted—I might better say, pined for you, my child, every hour. There was a void in my heart which nothing could fill up; a dreary sense of privation, that haunted me at every step. I remembered your varied powers of beguiling even age and disappointment of their gloom; your unequalled talents; and the artless affection which you had often evinced for me; and I wondered at the perversity which had infatuated me to deprive myself of such a treasure. And when I looked at Horace,

and saw how wretched I had made him; when I beheld in the aspect of Helen, discontent and ill-disguised anger; and even traced in the more guarded countenance of her mother, an expression of grave rebuke—I not only wondered at—I hated myself! Ask me not, dear girl, why I was mad enough to persevere in accumulating such needless misery upon my head: the prejudices, the illiberality, the vindictive spirit that urged me on, brought with them their own punishment. But, at length, my better angel seems to have obtained the ascendancy; and under your magic influence, my soothing, precious Blanch, I may yet hope, during the residue of my long-heckered, and but rarely brightened existence, to know the blessing of real family concord, and undisturbed domestic attachment.”

He then, putting her hand into Mr. Tremayne's, and regarding them both with the truest paternal fondness, bestowed upon them jointly the most impressive benediction; adding, “ You must retard his happiness no longer, my child. I will not permit you to consider the situation of the wretched Charles

as an obstacle to your immediate union. He may continue in the same state many weeks; nay, months; nor can it, indeed, with certainty, be pronounced, that he may not eventually recover. Why should you and Horace, however, be condemned to await the uncertain issue of his illness? Accept felicity, my Blanch, when it tenders itself to your grasp, with unhesitating gratitude:—few are the individuals to whom the choice of receiving or rejecting the blessing is permitted.”

Tremayne, electrified by this unexpected and enrapturing exhortation, fixed upon Blanch a gaze of fervent, anxious, supplication; and in a voice trembling with impatience, cried, “*Can* you resist such an advocate? Speak—Speak—I conjure you.”

She raised her eyes, for half a second, to his face; withdrew them again with the most vivid blush, and then, in a low, faltering, but nearly playful voice, answered, in the words of his own well-remembered quotation—

“*Chi s'arrossisce, e tace, dice assai.*” *

* She who blushes and is mute, explains herself sufficiently.

The brief sentence was decisive. Tremayne, no longer master of himself, caught her impetuously to his heart; whilst Sir Reginald, smiling with delight upon them both, again called down blessings upon their heads, and demanded from us all, our most cordial congratulations.

George soon after entered, leading in my charming sister-in-law, whom I had the sincere pleasure of seeing received, not only by Lady Horatia, but by the fastidious Baronet, with every testimony of the most marked complacency and respect. My father has also given me since much satisfaction by informing me, that previously to my appearing, Sir Reginald had addressed to him and to my mother, the handsomest apologies for his recent conduct towards our family; his sudden breach of all intercourse; and his failure in what was due to my father, when, without coming to any explanation, he so arbitrarily retracted his consent to the proposed alliance. He pleaded guilty to each of these offences; but said he threw himself upon their mercy to forgive the past, and to accept, as sincerely as they were offered, the

humble excuses which it had been *one* amongst many of the inducements of his present visit, to make as early as possible.—What can be said, even to an acknowledged culprit, who so candidly rests his only hope of forgiveness upon the placability of his judges? Blanch has often truly observed, that in Sir Reginald Tourberville, there are, in a very remarkable degree, the elements of all that we are alternately forced to love or hate, the most. No man can be more magnificently generous, or more parsimoniously illiberal; no man can be more gracious and insinuating, or more disdainful and insolent; no man can exhibit greater sensibility, or more ruthless hardness of heart!—How are such extremes in the same character to be accounted for?—Why, by parodying a line of Cowper's, I have satisfactorily explained to myself the whole mystery :

* God gave him goodness,—the world gave him pride.*

We were very urgent with our most acceptable visitors, to dismiss their carriage, and spend here the remainder of the day :

* The line referred to, is this ;—‘ God made the country, and man made the town.’

but we could not prevail. Sir Reginald, I suspect, thought, that it would be rather embarrassing to meet the rest of the family, before his consanguinity to Blanch was made known ; since the sudden revival of his attentions to her, unless the reason was understood, must appear to be the mere effect of caprice.—On going away, he told my mother, that her sole chance of relief from the burthen of continuing to have *two* of his grand-daughters upon her hands, rested with Horace and Mr. Lloyd : “ unless, indeed,” he added, half-smiling, “ you can persuade either of the young ladies, to prefer the delights of East Vale, to those of Hazleford.”

We all protested against allowing them any such option : and the Baronet very frankly admitted, that, under present circumstances, East Vale could be no desirable residence for any young person ;—“ Nothing,” said he, “ supports Helen Tracy through the cheerlessness of such a situation, but the presence of her mother, whose kindness to me, induces her to forego the comforts of her pleasant home, in order to administer consolation to my distresses.

When we were once more by ourselves, George told us, that the summons which he had received to East Vale, had been chiefly for the purpose of warmly acknowledging the services which he had rendered to Blanch, and of assuring him that the papers (meaning the attested copies of Joscelin's marriage certificates) which he had formerly sent to Sir Reginald, had never reached—never even been heard of by him till the present day! He made no comment upon so painful an avowal: but hastened to add, that he was most fully and perfectly satisfied of the authenticity of all the documents now laid before him; and was ready joyfully to admit the claims of Blanch to his name—his possessions—and the heart of his nephew.

“Tremayne,” continued my Brother, “though he had been sanguine in predicting such a result from the long-deferred explanation, was yet so transported when the happy moment of express decision arrived, that he grasped the old gentleman's hand, and shook and wrung it, till I verily believed he would have separated it from his shoulder! The assault, however, was complacently

borne; and the danger of incurring its renewal (which, I own, was not trifling) magnanimously defied for the pleasure of informing us, that he meant immediately to repair hither, to repeat all these assurances in person."

The projected communication to Jane Tourberville and my two sisters, of the relationship between Blanch and Sir Reginald, was made yesterday after dinner, when we quitted the eating-room. The astonishment of all parties, quite equalled what I had expected: but Jane gave me great pleasure by evincing something *more* than mere astonishment; she shewed real warmth of heart, and embraced Blanch, and congratulated herself on being so nearly allied to her, with girlish, perhaps, but genuine glee: "And are you really my cousin?" cried she, "Dear, how glad I am! If I had looked round the world for a new relation, I could not have found one that I like better—no, nor half so well, as I do you, my dear Blanch."

Martha, stared and wondered just as I was assured she would; and I dare say, wished herself an heiress likewise, with all her heart. Since the discovery, she behaves to Blanch with a great deal better manners.

Philippa, exclusive of amazement, manifested little other emotion. Blanch has never succeeded in gaining much hold over her affection. My mother, however, says, that she will like her better now that the stigma of being her *aunt* is done away with. How that may be I cannot pretend to foresee; all I know is, that her curiosity to hear the details of the story is infinitely the most lively feeling which she has yet exhibited upon the subject; and that when she and I were, this morning, left together a few minutes in the breakfast-room, she uttered certain reflections against George, and indistinctly said something about sending an *interloper* amongst us, which made me so angry, that I found courage to impose silence upon her, with more authority than I ever assumed towards her in my life.

George has been making enquiries as to the houses in the neighbourhood that are va-

cant, and signifies a wish, if it were possible to establish himself near us. Meadthorpe, alas! is gone, I fear for ever. My father sold it upon a very long lease, and the original purchaser likes it so well, that he has constantly resided there ever since we quitted it. As that is the case, the next circumstance to be desired is, that George and Emily should meet with some residence in this vicinity tempting enough to induce them to look no farther. Mr. Tremayne proposes a scheme to facilitate our wishes, which I think will be adopted. His mother, he says, to whom the choice is left, till the young Viscount comes of age, of either letting or inhabiting Bovil Court, is desirous to find a good tenant, as she soon purposes removing for the winter from Cheltenham to London; and he recommends the place to my brother, upon the authority of Mr. Westcroft, who lately superintended its thorough repair, as being in most excellent condition, and ready for his and Mrs. Stavordale's *almost* immediate reception. George asked the meaning of the stress laid upon the word *almost* :

“ I will explain its meaning,” said Tremayne, “ and you will allow that it is of a nature to apologise for my soliciting from you, if you do engage Bovil Court, a short delay in taking possession of it. I cannot bear, at this dreary season of the year, to introduce Blanch, for the first time, to my poor, decried, paternal mansion, Birchinghurst. Were the weather finer, the beauty of the surrounding scenery might make her ample amends for the want of beauty in the house itself: but in this gloomy month of November, what external scenery can compensate for internal deformity? dark rooms, cold passages, and, in the lower part of the building, stone floors? Summer will brighten and cheer, and dissipate, all these inconveniences; and till summer arrives, I am determined, as well for her comfort as my own credit, not to convey her to my unfortunate domain. We cannot, during the present posture of affairs, be at East Vale; we neither of us wish to go to Bath, or Brighton, or any of the usual places of winter resort.—Where, then, for a month or two, can we be so well,—so near our two families—(allow

us, dear Sir Geoffrey, still to call ourselves members of yours)—so happily within reach of all our favourite haunts, as at Bovil Court? My mother, I well know, will gladly lend it to us for the short time that we shall want it; and when we go to town, or if circumstances permit it, pay a Christmas visit to my uncle, you may succeed to our vacated home, Mr. Stavordale, as soon as you please.”

This was a most welcome arrangement to us all. My mother’s eyes sparkled with joy at the prospect of still retaining Blanch and Mr. Tremayne so near us. My father cordially united with her in pressing George and his wife to continue with us whilst Bovil Court was so desirably occupied; and, as an inducement to Emily, in particular, to assent to the plan, urged her to invite her kind uncle, Mr. William Cope, who has so long been accustomed to depend upon her for his domestic enjoyments, to join her here as early as possible. Gratefully and gladly she accepted the offer; George looked highly pleased by it; and we all retired from the

consultation with hearts warmed by the hope of a social, animated, happy winter.

The report from East Vale, of the state of Mr. Tourberville, is, to-day, a little improved; a circumstance which, to say the truth, we more rejoice at on account of Horace and Blanch, than on his own. Should he die immediately, their marriage must unavoidably be deferred; and where one cause of delay succeeds another so rapidly as would be the case in this instance, my heart always misgives me for the event.

Miss Tracy accompanied her mother and Sir Reginald here this morning, and was in such exuberant spirits at sight of Blanch, that Lady Horatia *threatened* to call her to order; though, in fact, she looked (but with more composure of manner) almost as happy as her daughter.

During one part of this visit, when out of reach of being heard by the Baronet, she said to me: "What a Tourberville they have had the luck to find at last!—This Blanch of ours would redeem a whole race from infamy. I begin to like the name again for her sake: Charles, I must own, had completely poi-

soned its sound to my ears ; and whilst I was so angry with his father, for tormenting my poor Horace, *he* could not be said to improve it to me ; I rejoiced at nothing so much as at the refusal of Horace to exchange for it his own. But all these feelings of malice and hatred are now drowned in the Red Sea. *Blanch Tourberville* is an association of names that presents to my mind an idea of something so ingenuous, so upright, so pure, and guileless, that I could even bring myself to hail her husband as a Tourberville (provided Horace is that husband) with the utmost complacency."

"Do you think then," said I, "that Mr. Tremayne will indulge his uncle in this point?"

"I have no right to think about it, for I have never heard the subject discussed between them : but I know that Sir Reginald passionately desires it ; and surely, when, that miserable son of his is gone,—and when, by marrying the heiress, Horace is secure of the estate without being guilty of injustice to any body—surely then, to set the poor

old man's heart at rest, he may take the name without compunction."

She then adverted to the affairs of Jane. "Mr. Lloyd," said she, "having now, I understand, gone through all the usual forms, is in full possession of his living, and Sir Reginald has decreed, that he shall convey thither the fair Jane, as his bride, on Monday next. Tremayne's marriage cannot, of course, take place quite so early: but the delay will be as short as possible, as his uncle is himself most anxious that whatever may remain to be completed respecting settlements, should finally be concluded after the union has been solemnized."

"And when," said I, "is your *own* fate to be decided, my dear Miss Tracy?"

"What an ominous expression!—My fate?—Yes, Heaven knows, such it will be; such, in fact, this marrying is to us all. —

Well, then, — my *fate is to be decided* on the same day which decides that of Blanch. Lord Glenmorne (and who can wonder?) is dreadfully tired of East Vale; and he has petitioned my dear mother, who has generously consented — to give up the plan of waiting

till the ceremony could take place at her own house in Hampshire, and to allow it to be celebrated here. We are then to go to his lovely estate *in the fens*, which Horace once described in such inviting colours; and my mother, ever ready to sacrifice herself for others, remains with Sir Reginald till Charles is either pronounced out of danger — or released."

I thanked her for the perfect openness with which she had treated me, and said, that I was sure the information which I had received from her would afford Blanch the truest joy.

"Yes, poor soul; I dare say she will be glad enough to hear, that she will be kept in countenance at the altar by a companion who will look as much like a fool as herself!—I assure you, *I* shall not be at all sorry to enjoy the benefit of the partnership."

I asked her, after this, whether Antonio still remained at East Vale, known, as he now is, to have been the tool employed by Mr. Tourberville to compass some of his worst designs?

Oh, he has been gone some time," an-

swered Miss Tracy. — “ His has been the usual fate of almost all subordinate assistants in iniquitous schemes: when no longer wanted, he was ignominiously discarded by his former employer. The sight of him was so odious to Charles, from the moment that he returned unsuccessful, after his late notable mission to town, that he contrived, weak as he is, to write a line to Horace, requesting him to discharge the ‘ scoundrel ’ (as for good fellowship he called him) without delay. The pliant Signor Antonio, duly remunerated for his honest services, was accordingly dismissed. He did not, however, before he quitted the house, fail to give vent, in the rage of his heart, to sundry horrible anecdotes relative to his master, which caused my poor maid’s hair to stand an end !—I would not let her repeat one of them in my hearing, and exhorted her to endeavour to forget them all herself as fast as she could. She seemed half doubtful of the possibility of ever doing so, she told me, ‘ even if she lived to the age of Methuselah.’ But I have since found, that talking to her of wedding-clothes, and giving her a commission to buy up all the

white ribbon in the county to make into bridal favours, has wonderfully contributed to expedite the oblivious process which I had recommended."

The novel circumstance of having to behold Blanch under a different appellation, seems to have awakened amongst our neighbours as much anxiety to look at her again, as if they thought that, in changing her name and family connexions, she had undergone some strange personal metamorphosis. Visitors have been pouring in upon us the whole morning; and a rich regale they must have had. In addition to the pleasure of having Blanch to contemplate in her new character, there were my brother and his wife to survey — perfect strangers to them all; and Jane Tourberville to examine, in order to see how she bore this unexpected cousin's elevation; and, from time to time, one or other of the approaching bridegrooms (Mr. Tremayne or Mr. Lloyd) to gaze at, and, mentally, to make remarks upon. At a hundred miles

distance from London, these are no trivial objects of amusement.

Amongst those who came with the most sincerely cordial feelings, was our good little friend, Mrs. Crosby, An incident which contributed to the advantage of “pretty Miss Blanch,” could not be regarded by her with indifference;—indeed, Blanch has uniformly been a first-rate favourite of her’s, and her congratulations, therefore, were most hearty and joyful. She assured us, that the sentiments of all those to whom the personal character of the future proprietors of East Vale was a matter of interest, were so warmly in favour of Mr. Tremayne and Miss Blanch, that “could they have chosen amongst the whole body of English gentry, those two—Mr. Tremayne, because he is already *known* to be good, and Miss Blanch, because they say she looks as if she *would* be good—those two are the landlords they would have pitched upon.”

Before she went away, she drew me apart, and looking very anxious to secure my attention, said:—Let me, my dear Miss Stavor-dale, give you a little friendly hint. Do all

you can to prevent there being any foolish delays (for the sake of new carriages, or fine clothes, or any such nonsense), in the marriage of these nice young people. I promise you, Crosby thinks a great deal worse of Mr. Tourberville than he chuses that Sir Reginald should suppose he does. His life hangs by a thread;—so, if you do not mean to have the match put off for half a year, perhaps, or more, avoid all unnecessary shilly-shallying, and pop them off to church as quick as possible. Crosby will do his best, if it was only for *their* sakes, to keep the poor man alive: but no doctor can send Death about his business, you know, if he is determined to have his prey;—and how can one tell what crotchets the old Baronet may take into his head again, if he has too much time given him to sit and ponder over the business?”

I told her (and very truly) that I thought her advice excellent, and would do all in my power to contribute to its being followed. She looked extremely pleased; shook me by the hand with great warmth; and, hoping that she should not be forgotten when the wedding-cake was distributed, took her leave

Mr. Westcroft comes here, I think, with greater satisfaction than ever, since the arrival of my brother. They discuss their several theories on the subject of farming with indefatigable perseverance ; and George, with whom, at present, the whole business is *mercely* theory, acquires, without being aware of it, much useful and sensible practical information, from the conversation of his new friend. Emily, whose earnest wish it is to live chiefly in the country, delights in hearing her husband so eager to talk of agricultural affairs, and takes every opportunity of instigating Mr. Westcroft to encourage the growing propensity.

Alas! for poor Philippa!—If ever, in her heart, she assigned to Mr. Tremayne's friend the regal dignity to which my mother once said that she had exalted him, *King Elsmere* has proved unworthy of his accession!—He has quietly abdicated the sceptre, and departed from East Vale, not to roam about the world unshackled ; but, as he himself insinuated the other evening in Philippa's hearing, to fulfil a matrimonial engagement with one of those Miss Balfours who, when Blanch

was at East Vale, was paying a visit there with her loquacious mother. This, in a double sense, was truly mortifying intelligence to my poor sister; for she instantly remembered having, on a variety of occasions, addressed to Mr. Elsmere the most sarcastic observations concerning this very young lady; and so blinded was she at the time, that she thought the silence with which he heard her, and the momentary look of vexation which used to cross his face, were indications of his own disgust at the primness and pride which she was so unmercifully criticising. This will be a lesson to her, I trust, never to be forgotten; since nothing can be more dangerous than to go into a house where two young people are residing together, and, whilst ignorant of the degree of intimacy there may be between them, allowing ourselves the liberty of ridiculing to one party the faults of the other.

Mr. Westcroft asked me this evening, with some significance in his looks, how the event (meaning Mr Elsmere's departure) had been borne?—I pretended not to understand his full meaning, and answered very calmly—

“ Perfectly well. We liked him as the friend of Mr. Tremayne; but there was nothing sufficiently remarkable in his talents or conversation to make his absence a matter of much concern to us.”

“ *We and us,*” resumed our arch neighbour, “ are as good, indefinite, generalizing monosyllables, as any that you could have chosen to neutralize the meaning of your answer. I am just as wise as I was; and you are just as guarded as I ought to have foreseen that you would be.”

I have been tempted, more than once, to suspect that if all the younger men who have contended, or been supposed to have contended, for Philippa's favour, were removed, Mr. Westcroft would have no reluctance to enter the lists for himself. He has never affected to be blind to her faults, certainly: but he knows better than any man what are her real good qualities; he knows, that, with a very limited allowance, she is generous to the poor; that she is susceptible of the sincerest gratitude towards those who serve or oblige her; that she has warm filial affections,—and, with all her vanity, her eager-

ness for conquest, and her jealousy of superior beauty, has, in fact, a *heart* much better than her *head*. How fervently should I rejoice were such an union to take place! A few years back, Philippa would probably have refused him : but the wings of her ambition are now a little clipped ; and she might, not unaptly, say with Rosalind, “ *my pride fell with my fortune.*” Mr. Westcroft, of all the men I am acquainted with, is the one most formed to make her happy and respectable in married life ; to improve her temper ; to cultivate and enlarge her understanding ; and to substitute real dignity of character for that affectation of undue importance, which, now too often deforms her manners.—Steady, calm, and penetrating, yet cheerful, and by no means rigorous, he would guide her so gently, but so undeviatingly, in the right path, that whoever had known her as Philippa Stavordale, would soon behold in her, as Mrs. Westcroft, a new creature.—I have the possibility of this union so earnestly at heart, that I mean to give Philippa a quiet hint of my suspicions of her influence : the suggestion, if it is a

welcome one, may then be left to its own operation.

Wilson arrived early yesterday evening with his young charge, Mr. Tourberville's son, at Bovil Court ; and this morning Horace was able to fulfil his promise of introducing him, unobserved, into the father's apartment. The child is a fine, animated, little creature, seems to be well-disposed, and to have had great pains taken with his education, temper, and habits. He has never lived with his father, but has gone over annually, under the care of his tutor, to spend a month or six weeks with him at Boulogne, or whatever other place upon the opposite coast, Mr. Tourberville chose to appoint.

On being conducted into the invalid's room, the poor boy testified great dismay at sight of his haggard and cadaverous aspect. Horace encouraged him to approach the sofa on which Tourberville was reclined ; and a scene which would, he says, have softened any heart, however justly hardened against Charles, ensued between him and this darling boy, which made so strong an impression

upon Tremayne, that he has pledged himself in the most solemn manner to undertake the guardianship of the boy, and to bestow upon him such an education as may, at a proper age, qualify him for one of the liberal professions. A promise so every way generous, melted the selfish heart even of the long-malignant Charles, and forced from him a burst of tears, accompanied by such extreme agitation, that Horace, much alarmed, flew into the anti-room for Mr. Crosby (who luckily was in attendance), and leaving the poor man to his care, hurried off with the child, whom he immediately conveyed back to Bovil Court.

When talking over with Blanch this fresh instance of her lover's nobleness of mind, I thought it not wholly superfluous to give her *one* little caution, on the observance of which, I told her, I thought that much of the happiness of her future life depended.

“ You have bestowed your heart,” I said, “ upon a man, who, without the taint of a single vice, is, however, with all his excellencies, not wholly exempted from human imperfections. It appears to me, that the

fault of his nature is a tendency to jealousy, which it behoves the woman he marries to be particularly careful not to arouse. You are lively, my dear Blanch, and inexperienced. You will henceforward mix more with the world than you have done hitherto, and consequently, you will be more exposed to attract the attention of gay, perhaps, unprincipled men, who may think it good sport to endeavour to sow dissention between you and your husband. The sight of happiness is to some minds a sure provocative to mischief. Do not, because confident of the innocence of your intentions, suffer yourself to disregard the danger of irritating Tremayne's feelings. Always bear in mind, that it rests with you to aggravate or allay the one known fault of your husband's temper, and that it is equally your interest and your most imperious duty, to guard against the remotest probability of destroying his and your own peace, by any inconsiderate, or even playful defiance of his *master passion*."

"Oh, how much greater justice I do him," cried Blanch, with energy, "than to believe

that he is infected, in so alarming a degree, with the miserable failing which you attribute to him ! I have no fear that the master-passion of a mind like his can be one of so ungenerous a nature as jealousy. The symptoms which he showed of such a propensity when Lord John Alcester was in question, admit of great extenuation. On his first being seized with them, he knew not that he was himself already in possession of my heart ; and saw me beset with the assiduities of a man who appeared *determined* not to let me retain my free agency, or permit me to distance him, however I might wish it. This man too was handsome, young, of high rank, and very accomplished ; and Mr. Tremayne, wholly ignorant, let me repeat, of the secret preference I felt for him, was, for about two days, jealous of his obtrusive attentions. Could any thing be more natural ? More pardonable ? If I had seen him half as much courted by any of the young ladies then at East Vale, I should have been jealous too ! Afterwards, when he was tormented by a return of the malady, was it possible to have stronger apparent cause for mistrust,

than he unfortunately was provided with? I was revoking, without adequate motive, in his opinion, a solemn engagement into which I had entered with him; pains had been taken by Mr. Tourberville to infuse suspicion of Lord John into his mind; and when it suddenly occurred to him to accuse me of being influenced to dissolve our contract by attachment to that nobleman, I looked guilty, confused, and made no attempt to deny the charge. What did all this indicate? And what was it so likely to effect, as a full confirmation of his worst fears? But *now* that he so well knows my heart; now that we are both privileged, he to ask, and I to confide, every thought of my soul to him, how can there be any danger of his distrusting me a moment? Oh, no; he has taught me what his symptoms are, and I should know them again at half a glance. Should they (which Heaven forbid!) ever, in the slightest degree, recur, the promptitude with which I would avail myself of my right to clear away every unfounded apprehension from his mind; the solicitude I should feel

to regain his confidence; and the honest joy he would behold in me when I had succeeded,—would not these soon convince him, that he had a wife too sincerely devoted to him; too anxious to set his heart at ease, and too determined to make him confess to her every uneasy imagination as it arose, to become the voluntary disturber of the mutual happiness which, I trust, will be our portion !”

Charmed by the candour, good sense, and firm, but tender courage of this speech, I fondly and approvingly embraced her; and could not forbear (I hope there was no treachery in the deed) when, some time after, I had an opportunity of speaking to him without witnesses, repeating the substance of what she had said to Mr. Tremayne.

He was deeply penetrated by the communication.

“Excellent creature!” exclaimed he, with moistened eyes; “gentle, yet wise, and admirable Blanch! Ah! believe me, she is right! Mine is not a temper constitutionally prone to suspicion. I may, at intervals,

since my passion for her took possession of my soul,—I may have exhibited unwarrantable indications of this hateful failing. But—as she says—now that I have assurance of her love; now that the most unreserved interchange of thought is admissible between us, I should abhor myself, were I capable of relapsing into the sin of distrusting that attachment which influences her to become my own !”

We certainly exhibit in this house an assemblage of the most fortunate individuals that were ever collected together!—Every thing prospers with us so beyond calculation, that whether it be a mighty difficulty, or a slight dilemma, it equally yields to our wishes, and, as it were, arranges itself for our accommodation.

There had been for some days past, amongst the members of the two families, at East Vale and Hazleford, a little perplexity as to the best method of disposing of Lord Earlsford on the marriage of his tutor. It is not to be

supposed that Mr. Tremayne wished for him just at present as an inmate at Bovil Court ; neither could we avoid concluding that his residence at Storriton Rectory would be equally undesirable. Of all associates upon earth for newly-married people, a lounging youth, without pursuit, or any spontaneous love of employment, would be the most intolerable. East Vale, however, was thought at this time too dismal for him ;—and we were all at a loss to decide what could with most propriety be done, when Mr. Westcroft last night stepped forward to our relief. He has invited the young Viscount to his house, till the period arrives for his going to Oxford ; and a more advantageous plan for Lord Earlsford could not have been devised. He seems to like the thoughts of such a visit extremely ; and was here this morning, in high spirits, talking of the excellent sporting dogs which he has heard that Mr. Westcroft possesses, and anticipating much amusement from going out with them every day with a certain double-barrelled fowling-piece, of which he made repeated and most honourable mention. I am much mistaken if Mr.

Westcroft does not try to entice him to something better than the mere pursuit of a hare or a pheasant.

I am just returned from having been present at the marriage of Jane Tourberville. My father and mother, in compliment to Mr. Lloyd, and Martha as bridemaid, were likewise at the ceremony. Philippa declined going; and to Blanch we did not even make the proposal. Lady Horatia came here to breakfast, and was afterwards one of the bridal party; Mr. Tremayne also attended: but Sir Reginald sent an excuse, on the plea of indisposition. Poor Jane was quite frightened and fluttered enough, without requiring the formidable addition of her grandfather's presence. Upon the whole, however, she went through the solemnity very well, and I sincerely hope will always have cause to commemorate it with pleasure.

Three days hence, the so much more interesting union of Blanch and Horace is to take

place. What shall I then do for a subject to *journalize* upon? In good truth, the best resolution I can make, after that event, is to give up the practice. Philippa, indeed, seems well disposed, since my little hint to her concerning Mr. Westcroft, to follow shortly in the steps of Blanch and Jane: but hers, I fear, will be but a very John Trot sort of a courtship; no obstacles will arise, except from her own little coquettish whims; and no vexations will harass Mr. Westcroft, except when she exacts from him too many gallant observances. I shall be the principal *confidante* of neither party, for the whole house will be in the secret; and with whatever ingenuity I might strive to eke it out, I am very sure that I could not, from the materials that will be furnished me by Philippa and Mr. Westcroft, spin out a Novel of more than three pages.

Blanch, after applying for my mother's permission, has asked Mr. Tremayne to bring his little guest, Henry Tourberville (for his father has given him the family name) to dinner here to-day. We are secure of not seeing Sir Reginald, who, as he absented

himself from the wedding, would not chuse to appear well enough to come out so immediately afterwards ; and Tremayne, anxious to obtain the good-will of Blanch for his future ward, most gladly assented to her proposal. Miss Tracy, extremely curious to see the child, is to come in the evening, for the declared purpose of “ascertaining, by his physiognomy, for which of his papa’s virtues he will be the most eminent.”

Our sweet Blanch, now no longer either a Stavordale or a Tourberville, became this morning the wife of the happy Tremayne. Sir Reginald gave her away, as he did also Miss Tracy. Mr. Lloyd, at his own particular request, performed the ceremony ; and the warm and grateful affection which he so justly entertains for Horace, caused him to go through it with a degree of feeling, which, added to the habitually fine tone of his voice, and the unaffected reverence and sanctity of his look, rendered the solemnity to every one present, almost too impressive to be borne.

Blanch, always so beautiful, appeared on this occasion to have acquired a new character of beauty. It was no longer her glowing youthfulness; her symmetry of face and form, nor even the perfection of grace in all her movements, that struck the eye:—it was the heavenly air of serene, because entire, reliance on the worth of him she had chosen; the subdued, but touching sensibility impressed upon her countenance, that attracted and fixed the delighted gazer. Tremayne was, of the two, for some minutes, much the most obviously agitated; it was, however, the agitation of joy—joy too potent to be restrained;—but ere the ceremony had proceeded far, he gained, as if influenced by her example, sufficient command over himself to maintain, till it was over, an aspect in which veneration for the place, and a confidence as unbounded as her own in the object of his selection, were alone conspicuous. As the concluding benediction was given, the sun burst forth with a resplendency so unusual at this season, that all those, who, like myself, might on such an occasion feel a little inclined to be superstitious, joyfully hailed

the circumstance as an *auspicious omen*. At the church door, our large party separated. Tremayne and Lord Glenmorne conducted their brides to their respective carriages, and drove off, the one to Bovil Court, the other back to East Vale; whence, an hour afterwards, they began their journey into Lincolnshire. At the instant of taking leave of our family (so long considered as her own), the self-possession of Blanch deserted her, and she clung round us, and wept with great emotion. We were not very well qualified to make good comforters, for, the truth is, there was not a dry eye amongst us. However, these “natural tears” were of so mixed a character, and partook so largely of pleasurable as well as painful feelings, that we were able to combine with them a few “watery smiles;” and Tremayne, anxious to abridge a scene trying to us all, hurried her to the chaise, where he probably, with looks better suited to the task, took the office of consoler upon himself.

During our absence, the venerable uncle of Emily, Mr. William Cope, had arrived at Hazleford, and the pleasant sight of her’s and

my brother's happiness on beholding him, was a cordial to our spirits which could never have been better timed.

This evening, a week from the date of my last writing, Charles Tourberville's existence was terminated by the renewed eruption of the blood-vessel, the weakness of which had so long put his life in danger. Lady Horatia communicated the intelligence to us in a short note, at the conclusion of which she says, "I have persuaded Sir Reginald to accompany me to-morrow for a few weeks into Hampshire. Every thing here will be decorously and properly attended to during his absence; and though in general averse from deserting thus expeditiously the house of mourning, I think that in the present case, and at his age, my efforts to remove him from such a scene are not without excuse."

F I N I S.



